

STARTLING
MYSTERY
STORIES

Spring No. 8

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UNUSUAL - EERIE - STRANGE

THE THREE
FROM THE
TOMB

by EDMOND
HAMILTON



Jules de Grandin in
THE WHITE
LADY OF
THE
ORPHANAGE

by SEABURY
QUINN



THE RETURN
OF THE
SORCEROR

by CLARK ASHTON
SMITH



STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES

Volume 2 CONTENTS FOR SPRING Number 2

COVER	Virgil Finlay	
THE EDITOR'S PAGE		5
THE WHITE LADY OF THE ORPHANAGE (novelet)	Seabury Quinn	8
THE GRAY PEOPLE	John Campbell Haywood	31
(Introduction by Sam Moskowitz)		
THE RECKONING		46
AND THEN NO MORE	Jay Tyler	47
THE ENDOCRINE MONSTER	R. Anthony	57
COMING NEXT ISSUE		75
THE RETURN OF THE SORCEROR	Clark Ashton Smith	76
THE THREE FROM THE TOMB (novelet)	Edmond Hamilton	90
THE CAULDRON (Your letters & Our Comment)		120
READERS' PREFERENCE PAGE (Double-barrelled)		129/130

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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the editor's page

One of the hardest things for an editor to remember, as he should remember at all times, is that every issue will be purchased by some who not only have never read the magazine before, but never read this kind of magazine before. For the most part, if he hears from readers at all, the editor hears from the veterans—or the new reader who is something of a fan of this sort of material, and has at least some background in it. But many will be brand new readers; and what remembering this means, in effect, is that, to a certain extent, the experienced enthusiasts must not be given foremost consideration at all times.

If the circulation population showed a majority of veterans (and I have no reason for assuming that this is the case), it would have been foolish of me to have run *The Dark Castle*, by Marion Brandon. That was a well-done little tale, in its own way, but everything in it is familiar to the oldtime reader. But for the newcomers, some of them never having read a vampire story before (seeing vampires in the movies is a different matter), it had a definite appeal; and this principle goes for every other type of weird mystery fiction. While I shall continue to search for stories which will have an appeal even to the hard-bitten faithful readers from way back when, now and then you are going to see something which may appear to be pretty old stuff to you. Please remember, when you do, that it was selected because the editor felt that, for all that, this is a good story in its own light.

The whole issue was brought to my attention, by a letter from Anthony V. Cassa, who pleads: "If possible, would you put the year of birth (and of death if it applies under each author's name in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*? Until recently, I had thought that Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft were contemporary writers."

Certainly a reasonable assumption for a neophyte; and, of course, they are contemporary in the sense that they are twentieth century writers—Lovecraft, who, for all his 18th century predilections, showed lively interest in science, and combined witchcraft lore with higher mathematics, is to my mind more contemporary than Howard.

I cannot promise to give such data as Reader Cassa asks for at all times. How can I give dates for a pseudonym, where the author's real identity has never been revealed to me—or where I know that the author does not want his alias exposed? And in many instances I just do not

(Turn to page 74)

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Howard Gervaise," he replied. "I'm superintendent of the Springville Orphans' Home."

I indicated a chair at the end of the study table and awaited further information.

"I was advised to consult you gentlemen by Mr. Willis Richards, of your city," he continued. "Mr. Richards told me you accomplished some really remarkable results for him at the time his jewelry was stolen, and suggested that you could do more to clear up our present trouble than anyone else. He is president of our board of trustees, you know," he added in explanation.

"U'm?" Jules de Grandin murmured noncommittally as he set fire to a fresh cigarette with the glowing butt of another. "I recall that Monsieur Richards. He figured in the affair of the disembodied hand, Friend Trowbridge, you remember. * *Parbleu*, I also recall that he paid the reward for his jewels' return with very bad grace. You come poorly introduced, my friend!—he fixed his uncompromising cat-stare on our caller—"how-
ever, say on. We listen."

Mr. Gervaise seemed to shrink in upon himself more than ever. It took small imaginative powers to vision him utterly cowed before the domineering manner of Willis Richards, our local nabob. "The fact is, gentlemen," he began with a soft, deprecating cough, "we are greatly troubled at the orphanage. Something mysterious—most mysterious—is taking place there. Unless we can arrive at some solution we shall be obliged to call in the police, and that would be most unfortunate. Publicity is to be dreaded in this case, yet we are at a total loss to explain the mystery."

"U'm," de Grandin inspected the tip of his cigarette carefully, as though it were something entirely novel, "most mysteries cease to be mysterious, once they are explained, *Monsieur*. You will be good enough to proceed?"

"Ah . . ." Mr. Gervaise glanced about the study as though to take inspiration from the surroundings, then coughed apologetically again. "Ah—the fact is, gentlemen, that several of our little charges have—ah—mysteriously disappeared. During the past six months we have missed no less than five of the home's inmates, two boys and three girls, and only day before yesterday a sixth one disappeared—vanished into air, if you can credit my statement."

"Ah?" Jules de Grandin sat forward a little in his chair, regarding

the caller narrowly. "They have disappeared, vanished, you do say? Perhaps they have decamped?"

"No-o," Gervaise denied, "I don't think that's possible, sir. Our home is only a semi-public institution, you know, being supported entirely by voluntary gifts and benefits of wealthy patrons, and we do not open our doors to orphan children as a class. There are certain restrictions imposed. For this reason, we never entertain a greater number than we are able to care for in a fitting manner, and conditions at Springville are rather different from those obtaining in most institutions of a similar character. The children are well fed, well clothed and excellently housed, and—as far as anyone in their unfortunate situation can be—are perfectly contented and happy. During my tenure of office, more than ten years, we have never had a runaway; and that makes these disappearances all the harder to explain. In each case the surrounding facts have been essentially the same, too. The child was accounted for at night before the signal was given to extinguish the lights, and—
and next morning he just wasn't there. That's all there is to say. There is nothing further I can tell you."

"YOU HAVE searched?" de Grandin asked.

"Naturally. The most careful and painstaking investigations have been made in every case. It was not possible to pursue the little ones with hue and cry, of course, but the home has been to considerable expense in hiring private investigators to obtain some information of the missing children, all without result. There is no question of kidnaping, either, for, in every case, the child was known to be safely inside not only the grounds, but in the dormitories, on the night preceding the disappearance. Several reputable witnesses vouch for that in each instance."

"U'm?" de Grandin commented once more. "You say you have been at considerable expense in the matter, *Monsieur*?"

"Yes."

"Good. Very good. You will please be at some more considerable expense. Dr. Trowbridge and I are *gens d'affaires*—businessmen—as well as scientists, *Monsieur*, and while we shall esteem it an honor to serve the fatherless and motherless orphans of your home, we must receive an adequate consideration from Monsieur Richards. We shall undertake the matter of ascertaining the whereabouts of your missing charges at fifteen hundred dollars apiece. Do you agree?"

"But that would be three thousand dollars . . ." the visitor began.

"Perfectly," de Grandin interrupted. "The police will undertake the case for nothing."

* see *The Dead Hand*, in *The Phantom Fighter*, by Seabury Quinn.



portraits by

Virgil Finlay

The September 1937 issue of *WEIRD TALES* presented these two portraits of Mr. Quinn's popular characters, and they appeared regularly thereafter. The pictures are copyright 1937



The White Lady Of The Orphanage

by *Seabury Quinn*

(author of *The Mansion of Unholy Magic, The Druid's Shadow, etc.*)

And on the nights that a child disappeared, a figure in flowing white robes was seen . . .

by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, and we thank Mr. Finlay for his kind permission to run them here, as we bring these old favorite stories to you.

Of the six adventures of Drs. Jules de Grandin and Samuel Trowbridge that we have formerly presented in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*, four have been voted "best in the issue" by a clear majority of you, the active readers who vote; and in each instance, Mr. Quinn has had respectable competition. And for the sake of those of you who are new to us: twelve more stories of the bizarre adventures of de Grandin and Trowbridge appear in the Arkham House book, *The Phantom Fighter*, (263pp; \$5.00); none of these have appeared in SMS, nor will any of them be reprinted here so long as the book is in print. Nor would we suggest waiting for the edition to sell out, for we cannot promise to bring these particular tales thereafter, either!

"DR. TROWBRIDGE? Dr. de Grandin?" Our visitor looked questioningly from one of us to the other, that night in 192-

"I'm Trowbridge," I answered, "and this is Dr. de Grandin. What can we do for you?"

The gentle-faced, white-haired little man bowed rather nervously to each of us in turn, acknowledging the introduction. "My name is Gervaise,

ed me with an elfish grin, then fell to studying an elongated figure representing a female saint in one of the stained-glass windows, winking at the beattified lady in a highly irreverent manner.

"Good morning, gentlemen," Mr. Gervaise greeted us as the home's inmates filed past us, two by two. "Everything is arranged for your inspection. The children will be brought to you in my office as soon as you are ready for them. Mrs. Martin"—he turned with a smile to the white-haired organist who had joined us—"these are Dr. de Grandin and Dr. Trowbridge. They are going to inspect the children for diphtheria immunity this morning."

To us he added: "Mrs. Martin is our matron. Next to myself she has entire charge of the home. We call her 'Mother Martin,' and all our little ones love her as though she were really their own mother."

"How do you do?" the matron acknowledged the introduction, favoring us with a smile of singular sweetness and extending her hand to each of us in turn.

"Madame," de Grandin took her smooth, white hand in his, American fashion, then bowed above it, raising it to his lips. "your little charges are indeed more than fortunate to bask in the sunshine of your ministrations!" It seemed to me he held the lady's hand longer than necessity required, but like all his countrymen my little friend was more than ordinarily susceptible to the influence of a pretty woman, young or elderly.

"And now, *Monsieur*, if you please..." He resigned Mother Martin's plump hand regretfully and turned to the superintendent, his slim, black brows arched expectantly.

"Of course," Gervaise replied. "This way, if you please."

"It would be better if we examined the little ones separately and without any of the attendants being present," de Grandin remarked in a business-like tone, placing his medicine case on the desk and unfolding a white jacket.

"But surely you can not hope to glean any information from the children!" the superintendent protested. "I thought you were simply going to make a pretense of examining them as a blind. Mrs. Martin and I have questioned every one of them most carefully, and I assure you there is absolutely nothing to be gained by going over that ground again. Besides, some of them have become rather nervous, and we don't want to have their little heads filled with disagreeable notions, you know. I think it would be much better if Mother Martin or I were present while the children are examined. It would give them greater confidence, you know..."

"*Monsieur*"—de Grandin spoke in the level, toneless voice he assumed before one of his wild outbursts of anger—"you will please do exactly as I command. Otherwise..." He paused significantly and began removing the clinical smock.

"Oh, by no means, my dear sir," the superintendent hastened to assure him. "No, no; I wouldn't for the world have you think I was trying to put difficulties in your way. Oh, no; I only thought..."

"*Monsieur*," the little Frenchman repeated, "from this time onward, until we dismiss the case, I shall do the thinking. You will kindly have the children brought to me, one at a time."

TO SEE THE spruce little scientist among the children was a revelation to me. Always tart of speech to the verge of bitterness, with a keen, mordant wit which cut like a razor or scratched like a briar, de Grandin seemed the last one to glean information from children naturally timid in the presence of a doctor. But his smile grew brighter and brighter and his humor better and better as child after child entered the office, answered a few seemingly idle questions and passed from the room. At length a little girl, some four or five years old, came in, the hem of her blue pinafore twisted between her plump baby fingers in embarrassment.

"Ah," de Grandin breathed, "here is one from whom we shall obtain something of value, my friend, or I much miss my guess."

"*Hola, ma petite tête de chou!*" he exclaimed, snapping his fingers at the tot. "Come hither and tell Dr. de Grandin all about it!"

His "little cabbage-head" gave him an answering smile, but one of somewhat doubtful quality. "Dr. Grandin not hurt Betsy?" she asked, half confidently, half fearfully.

"*Parbleu*, not I, my pigeon," he replied as he lifted her to the desk. "*Regardez-vous!*" from the pocket of his jacket he produced a little box of bonbons and thrust them into her chubby hand. "Eat them, my little onion," he commanded. "*Tête du diable*, but they are an excellent medicine for loosening the tongue!"

Nothing loth, the little girl began munching the sweetmeats, regarding her new friend with wide, wondering eyes. "They said you would hurt me—cut my tongue out with a knife if I talked to you," she informed him, then paused to pop another chocolate button into her mouth.

"*Mort d'un chat*, did they indeed?" he demanded. "And who was the vile, detestable one who so slandered Jules de Grandin? I shall —s-s-sh!" he interrupted himself, turning and crossing the office in three long, cat-

"But we can not have the police, as I have just explained . . ."

"You can not have us for less," the Frenchman cut in. "This Monsieur Richards, I know him of old. He desires not the publicity of a search by the gendarmes, and, though he loves me not, he has confidence in my ability, otherwise he would not have sent you. Go to him and say Jules de Grandin will act for him for no less fee than that I have mentioned. Meantime, will you smoke?"

He passed a box of my cigars to the caller, held a lighted match for him and refused to listen to another word concerning the business which had brought Gervaise on the twenty-mile jaunt from Springville.

"TROWBRIDGE, *mon vieux*," he informed me the following morning at breakfast, "I assure you it pays handsomely to be firm with these captains of industry, such as Monsieur Richards. Before you had arisen, my friend, that man of wealth was haggling with me over the telephone as though we were a pair of dealers in second-hand furniture. *Morbleu*, it was like an auction. Bid by bid he raised his offer for our services until he met my figure. Today his attorneys prepare a formal document, agreeing to pay us each fifteen hundred dollars for the explanation of the disappearance of each of those six little orphans. A good morning's business, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"De Grandin," I told him, "you're wasting your talents in this work. You should have gone into Wall Street."

"*Eh bien*," he twisted the tips of his little blond mustache complacently. "I think I go very well as it is. When I return to *la belle France* next month I shall take with me upward of fifty thousand dollars—more than a million francs—as a result of my work here. That sum is not to be sneezed upon, my friend. And what is of even more value to me, I take with me the gratitude of many of your countrymen whose burdens I have been able to lighten. *Mordieu*, yes, this trip has been of great use to me, my old one."

"And . . ." I began.

"And tomorrow we shall visit this home of the orphans where Monsieur Gervaise nurses his totally inexplicable mystery. *Parbleu*, that mystery shall be explained, or Jules de Grandin is seven thousand francs poorer!"

"ALL ARRANGEMENTS have been made," he confided as we drove over to Springville the following morning. "It would never do for us to announce ourselves as investigators, my friend, so what surer disguise can we assume than that of being ourselves? You and I, are

we not physicians? But certainly. Very well. As physicians we shall appear at the home, and as physicians we shall proceed to inspect all the little ones—separately and alone—for are we not to give them the Schick test for diphtheria immunity? Most assuredly."

"And then . . .?" I began, but cut my question in two with a quick gesture and a smile.

"And then, my friend, we shall be guided by circumstances, and if there are no circumstances, *cordieu*, but we shall make them! *Allons*, there is much to do before we handle Monsieur Richards' check."

HOWEVER DARK the mystery overhanging the Springville Orphans' Home might have been, nothing indicating it was apparent as de Grandin and I drove through the imposing stone gateway to the spacious grounds. Wide, smoothly kept lawns, dotted here and there with beds of brightly blooming flowers, clean, tastefully arranged buildings of red brick in the Georgian style, and a general air of prosperity, happiness and peace greeted us as we brought our car to a halt before the main building of the home. Within, the youngsters were at chapel, and their clear young voices rose pure and sweet as bird-songs in springtime to the accompaniment of a mellow-toned organ:

"There's a home for little children
Above the bright blue sky,
Where Jesus reigns in glory,
A home of peace and joy,
No earthly home is like it,
Nor can with it compare . . ."

We tiptoed into the spacious assembly room, dimly lit through tall, painted windows, and waited at the rear of the hall till the morning exercises were concluded. Right and left de Grandin shot his keen, stock-taking glance, inspecting the rows of neatly clothed little ones in the pews, attractive young female attendants, and the mild-faced, gray-haired lady of matronly appearance who presided at the organ. "*Mordieu*, Friend Trowbridge," he muttered in my ear, "truly, this is mysterious. Why should any of the *pauvres orphelins* voluntarily quit such a place as this?"

"S-s-sh!" I cut him off. His habit of talking in and out of season, whether at a funeral, a wedding or other religious service, had annoyed me more than once. As usual, he took the rebuke in good part and favor-

like leaps. At the entrance he paused a moment, then grasped the handle and jerked the door suddenly open.

On the sill, looking decidedly surprised, stood Mr. Gervaise.

"Ah, *Monsieur*," de Grandin's voice held an ugly, rasping note as he glared directly into the superintendent's eyes, "you are perhaps seeking for something? Yes?"

"Er—yes," Gervaise coughed softly, dropping his gaze before the Frenchman's blazing stare. "Er—that is—you see, I left my pencil here this morning, and I didn't think you'd mind if I came to get it. I was just going to rap when . . ."

"When I saved you the labor, *n'est-ce-pas?*" the other interrupted. "Very good, my friend. Here!"—hastening to the desk he grabbed a handful of miscellaneous pencils, pens and other writing implements, including a stick of marking chalk—"take these and get gone in the name of the good God." He thrust the utensils into the astonished superintendent's hands, then turned to me, the gleam in his little blue eyes and the heightened color in his usually pale cheeks showing his barely suppressed rage. "Trowbridge, *mon vieux*," he almost hissed, "I fear I shall have to impress you into service as a guard. Stand at the outer door, my friend, and should anyone come seeking pens, pencils, paint-brushes or printing presses, have the goodness to boot him away. Me, I do not relish having people looking for pencils through the keyhole of the door while I interrogate the children!"

Thereafter I remained on guard outside the office while child after child filed into the room, talked briefly with de Grandin, and left by the farther door.

"Well, did you find out anything worth while?" I asked when the examination was finally ended.

"U'm," he responded, stroking his mustache thoughtfully, "yes and no. With children of a tender age, as you know, the line of demarcation between recollection and imagination is none too clearly drawn. The older ones could tell me nothing; the younger ones relate a tale of a 'white lady' who visited the dormitory on each night a little one disappeared, but what does that mean? Some attendant making a nightly round? Perhaps a window curtain blown by the evening breeze? Maybe it had no surer foundation than some childish whim, seized and enlarged upon by the other little ones. There is little we can go on at this time, I fear.

"Meanwhile," his manner brightened, "I think I hear the sound of the dinner gong. *Parbleu*, I am as hungry as a carp and empty as a kettledrum. Let us hasten to the refectory."

Dinner was a silent meal. Superintendent Gervaise seemed ill at ease under de Grandin's sarcastic stare, and the other attendants who shared the table with us took their cue from their chief and conversation languished before the second course was served. Nevertheless, de Grandin seemed to enjoy everything set before him to the uttermost, and made strenuous efforts to entertain Mrs. Martin, who sat immediately to his right.

"But *Madame*," he insisted when the lady refused a serving of the excellent beef which constituted the roast course, "surely you will not reject this so excellent roast! Remember, it is the best food possible for humanity, for not only does it contain the nourishment we need, but great quantities of iron are to be found in it, as well. Come, permit that I help you to that which is at once food and tonic!"

"No, thank you," the matron replied, looking at the juicy roast with a glance almost of repugnance. "I am a vegetarian."

"How terrible!" de Grandin commiserated, as though she had confessed some overwhelming calamity.

"Yes, Mother Martin's been subsisting entirely on vegetables for the last six months," one of the nurses, a plump, red-cheeked girl, volunteered. "She used to eat as much meat as any of us, but all of a sudden she turned against it, and—oh, Mrs. Martin!"

The matron had risen from her chair, leaning half-way across the table, and the expression on her countenance was enough to justify the girl's exclamation. Her face had gone pale—absolutely livid—her lips were drawn back against her teeth like those of a snarling animal, and her eyes seemed to protrude from their sockets as they blazed into the startled girl's. It seemed to me that not only rage, but something like loathing and fear were expressed in her blazing orbs as she spoke in a low, passionate voice: "Miss Bosworth, what I used to do and what I do now are entirely my own business. Please do not meddle with my affairs!"

For a moment silence reigned at the table, but the Frenchman saved the situation by remarking, "*Tiens, Madame*, the fervor of the convert is ever greater than that of those to the manner born. The Buddhist, who eats no meat from his birth, is not half so strong in defense of his diet as the lately converted European vegetarian!"

To me, as we left the dining hall, be confided, "A charming meal, most interesting and instructive. Now my friend, I would that you drive me home at once, immediately. I wish to borrow a dog from Sergeant Costello."

"What?" I responded incredulously. "You want to borrow a . . ."

"Perfectly. A dog. A police dog, if you please. I think we shall have use for the animal this night."

"Oh, all right," I agreed. The workings of his agile mind were beyond me, and I knew it would be useless to question him.

SHORTLY AFTER sundown we returned to the Springville home, a large and by no means amiable police dog, lent us by the local constabulary, sharing the car with us.

"You will engage Monsieur Gervaise in conversation, if you please," my companion commanded as we stopped before the younger children's dormitory. "While you do so, I shall assist this so excellent brute into the hall where the little ones sleep and tether him in such manner that he can not reach any of his little room-mates, yet can easily dispute passage with anyone attempting to enter the apartment. Tomorrow morning we shall be here early enough to remove him before any of the attendants who may enter the dormitory on legitimate business can be bitten. As for others . . ." He shrugged his shoulders and prepared to lead the lumbering brute into the sleeping quarters.

His program worked perfectly. Mr. Gervaise was nothing loth to talk with me about the case, and I gathered that he had taken de Grandin's evident dislike much to heart. Again and again he assured me, almost with tears in his eyes, that he had not the least intention of eavesdropping when he was discovered at the office door, but that he had really come in search of a pencil. It seemed he used a special indelible lead in making out his reports, and had discovered that the only one he possessed was in the office after we had taken possession. His protestations were so earnest that I left him convinced de Grandin had done him an injustice.

Next morning I was at a loss what to think. Arriving at the orphanage well before daylight, de Grandin and I let ourselves into the little children's dormitory, mounted the stairs to the second floor where the youngsters slept, and released the vicious dog which the Frenchman had tethered by a stout nail driven into the floor and a ten-foot length of steel chain. Inquiry among the building's attendants elicited the information that no one had visited the sleeping apartment after we left, as there had been no occasion for anyone connected with the home to do so. Yet on the floor beside the dog there lay a ragged square of white linen, such as might have been ripped from a night-robe or a suit of pajamas; reduced almost to a pulp by the savage brute's worrying, and—

when Superintendent Gervaise entered the office to greet us, he was wearing his right arm in a sling.

"You are injured, *Monsieur*?" de Grandin asked with mock solicitude, noting the superintendent's handaged hand with dancing eyes.

"Yes," the other replied, coughing apologetically. "yes, sir. I—I cut myself rather badly last night on a pane of broken glass in my quarters. The window must have been broken by a shutter being blown against it, an . . ."

"Quite so," the Frenchman agreed amiably. "They bite terrifically, these broken window-panes, is it not so?"

"Bite?" Gervaise echoed, regarding the other with a surprised, somewhat frightened expression. "I hardly understand you—oh, yes, I see," he smiled rather feebly. "You mean cut."

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin assured him solemnly as he rose to leave, "I did mean exactly what I said; no more and certainly no less."

"Now what?" I queried as we left the office and the gaping superintendent behind us.

"*Non, non*," he responded irritably. "I know not what to think, my friend. One thing, he points this way, another, he points elsewhere. Me, I am like a mariner in the midst of a fog. Go you to the car, Friend Trowbridge, and chaperone our so estimable ally. I shall pay a visit to the laundry, meantime."

None too pleased with my assignment, I re-entered my car and made myself as agreeable as possible to the dog, devoutly hoping that the hearty breakfast de Grandin had provided him had taken the edge off his appetite. I had no wish to have him stay his hunger on one of my limbs. The animal proved docile enough, however, and besides opening his mouth once or twice in prodigious yawns which gave me an excellent dentition, did nothing to cause me alarm.

WHEN de GRANDIN returned he was fuming with impatience and anger. "*Sacre nom d'un grillon!*" he swore. "It is beyond me. Undoubtedly this Monsieur Gervaise is a liar, it was surely no glass which caused the wound in his arm last night; yet there is no suit of torn pajamas belonging to him in the laundry."

"Perhaps he didn't send them to be washed," I ventured with a grin. "If I'd been somewhere I was not supposed to be last night and found someone had posted a man-eating dog in my path, I'd not be in a hurry to send my torn clothing to the laundry where it might betray me."

"*Tiens*, you reason excellently, my friend," he complimented, "but

can you explain how it is that there is no torn night-clothing of Monsieur Gervaise at the washrooms today, yet two ladies' night-robes—one of Mere Martin's, one of Mademoiselle Bosworth's—display exactly such rents as might have been made by having this bit of cloth torn from them?" He exhibited the relic we had found beside the dog that morning and stared gloomily at it.

"H'm, it looks as if you hadn't any facts which will stand the acid test just yet," I replied flippantly; but the seriousness with which he received my commonplace rejoinder startled me.

"*Morbleu*, the acid test, do you say?" he exclaimed. "*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu*, it may easily be so! Why did I not think of it before? Perhaps. Possibly. Who know? It may be so!"

"What in the world . . ." I began, but he cut me short with a frantic gesture.

"*Non, non*, my friend, not now," he implored. "Me, I must think. I must make this empty head of mine do the work for which it is so poorly adapted. Let us see, let us consider, let us ratiocinate!"

"*Parbleu*, I have it!" He drew his hands downward from his forehead with a quick, impatient motion and turned to me. "Drive me to the nearest pharmacy, my friend. If we do not find what we wish there, we must search elsewhere, until we discover it. *Mordieu*, Trowbridge, my friend, I thank you for mentioning that acid test! Many a wholesome truth is contained in words of idle jest, I do assure you."

FIVE MILES OUT of Springfield a gang of workmen were resurfacing the highway, and we were forced to detour over a back road. Half an hour's slow driving along this brought us to a tiny Italian settlement where a number of laborers originally engaged on the Lackawanna's right of way had bought up the swampy, low-lying lands along the creek and converted them into model truck gardens. At the head of the single street composing the hamlet was a neatly whitewashed plank building bearing the sign *Farmacia Italiana*, together with a crudely painted representation of the Italian royal coat of arms.

"Here, my friend," de Grandin commanded, plucking me by the sleeve. "Let us stop here a moment and inquire of the estimable gentleman who conducts this establishment that which we would know."

"But what . . . ?" I began, then stopped, noting the futility of my question. Jules de Grandin had already leaped from the car and entered the little drug store.

Without preamble he addressed a flood of fluent Italian to the drug-

gist, receiving monosyllabic replies which gradually expanded both in verbosity and volume accompanied by much waving of hands and lifting of shoulders and eyebrows. What they said I had no means of knowing, since I understood no word of Italian, but I heard the word *acido* repeated several times by each of them during the three minutes' heated conversation.

When de Grandin finally turned to leave the store, with a grateful bow to the proprietor, he wore an expression as near complete mystification and surprise as I had ever seen him display. His little eyes were rounded with mingled thought and amazement, and his narrow red lips were pursed beneath the line of his little blond mustache as though he were about to emit a low, soundless whistle.

"Well?" I demanded as we regained the car. "Did you find out what you were after?"

"Eh?" he answered absently. "Did I find—Trowbridge, my friend, I know not what I found out, but this I know: those who lighted the witch-fires in olden days were not such fools as we believe them. *Parbleu*, at this moment they are grinning at us from their graves, or I am much mistaken. Tonight, my friend, be ready to accompany me back to that orphans' home where the devil nods approval to those who perform his business so skilfully."

That evening he was like one in a muse, eating sparingly and seemingly without realizing what food he took, answering my questions absent-mindedly or not at all, even forgetting to light his customary cigarette between dinner and dessert. "*Nom d'un champignon*," he muttered, staring abstractedly into his coffee cup, "it must be that it is so; but who would believe it?"

I sighed in vexation. His habit of musing aloud but refusing to tell the trend of his thoughts while he arranged the factors of a case upon his mental chessboard was one which always annoyed me, but nothing I had been able to do had swerved him from his custom of withholding all information until he reached the climax of the mystery. "*Non, non*," he replied when I pressed him to take me into his confidence, "the less I speak, the less danger I run of showing myself to be one great fool, my friend. Let me reason this business in my own way, I beseech you." And there the matter rested.

Toward midnight he rose impatiently and motioned toward the door. "Let us go," he suggested. "It will be an hour or more before we reach our destination, and that should be the proper time for us to see what I fear we shall behold, Friend Trowbridge."

We drove across country to Springville through the early autumn night in silence, turned in at the orphanage gates and parked before the administration building, where Superintendent Gervaise maintained his living quarters.

"*Monsieur*," de Grandin called softly as he rapped gently on the superintendent's door, "it is I, Jules de Grandin. For all the wrong I have done you I humbly apologize, and now I would that you give me assistance."

Blinking with mingled sleep and surprise, the little, gray-haired official let us into his rooms and smiled rather fatuously at us. "What is it you'd like me to do for you, Dr. de Grandin?" he asked.

"I would that you guide us to the sleeping apartments of Mere Martin. Are they in this building?"

"No," Gervaise replied wonderingly. "Mother Martin has a cottage of her own over at the south end of the grounds. She likes the privacy of a separate house, and we . . ."

"*Précisément*," the Frenchman agreed, nodding vigorously. "I well understand her love of privacy, I fear. Come let us go. You will show us the way?"

MOTHER MARTIN'S cottage stood by the southern wall of the orphanage compound. It was a neat little building of the semi-bungalow type, constructed of red brick, and furnished with a low, wide porch of white-painted wood. Only the chirping of a cricket in the long grass and the long-drawn, melancholy call of a crow in the nearby poplars broke the silence of the starlit night as we walked noiselessly up the brick path leading to the cottage door. Gervaise was about to raise the polished brass knocker which adorned the white panels when de Grandin grasped his arm, enjoining silence.

Quietly as a shadow the little Frenchman crept from one of the wide, shutterless front windows to the other, looking intently into the darkened interior of the house, then, with upraised finger warning us to caution, he tiptoed from the porch and began making a circuit of the house, pausing to peer through each window as he passed it.

At the rear of the cottage was a one-story addition which evidently housed the kitchen, and here the blinds were tightly drawn, though beneath their lower edges there crept a faint narrow band of lamplight.

"*Ah—bien!*" the Frenchman breathed, flattening his aquiline nose against the window-pane as though he would look through the shrouding curtain by virtue of the very intensity of his gaze.

A moment we stood there in the darkness, de Grandin's little waxed mustache twitching at the ends like the whiskers of an alert tom-cat, Gervaise and I in total bewilderment, when the Frenchman's next move filled us with mingled astonishment and alarm. Reaching into an inner pocket, he produced a small, diamond-set glass-cutter, moistened it with the tip of his tongue and applied it to the window, drawing it slowly downward, then horizontally, then upward again to meet the commencement of the first down-stroke, thus describing an equilateral triangle on the pane. Before the cutter's circuit was entirely completed, he drew what appeared to be a square of thick paper from another pocket, hastily tore it apart and placed it face downward against the glass. It was only when the operation was complete that I realized how it was accomplished. The "plaster" he applied to the window was nothing more nor less than a square of fly-paper, and its sticky surface prevented any telltale tinkle from sounding as he finished cutting the triangle from the window-pane and carefully lifted it out by means of the gummed paper.

Once he had completed his opening he drew forth a small, sharp-bladed penknife, and working very deliberately, lest the slightest sound betray him proceeded to slit a peep-hole through the opaque window-blind.

For a moment he stood there, gazing through his spy-hole, the expression on his narrow face changing from one of concentrated interest to almost incredulous horror, finally to fierce, implacable rage.

"*A moi, Trowbridge, a moi Gervaise!*" he shouted in a voice which was almost a shriek as he thrust his shoulder unceremoniously against the pane, bursting it into a dozen pieces, and leaped into the lighted room beyond.

I scrambled after him as best I could, and the astounded superintendent followed me, mouthing mild protests against our burglarious entry of Mrs. Martin's house.

One glance at the scene before me took all thought of our trespass from my mind.

WHEELED ABOUT to face us, her back to a fiercely glowing coal-burning kitchen range, stood the once placid Mother Martin, enveloped from throat to knees in a commodious apron. But all semblance of her placidity was gone as she regarded the trembling little Frenchman who extended an accusing finger at her. Across her florid, smooth-skinned face had come such a look of fiendish rage as no flight of my imagination could have painted. Her lips, seemingly shrunk to half their natural thick-

ness, were drawn back in animal fury against her teeth, and her blue eyes seemed forced forward from her face with the pressure of hatred within her. At the corners of her twisting mouth were little flecks of white foam, and her jaw thrust forward like that of an infuriated ape. Never in my life, on any face, either bestial or human, had I seen such an expression. It was a revolting parody of humanity on which I looked, a thing so horrible, so incomparably cruel and devilish, I would have looked away if I could, yet felt my eyes compelled to turn again to the evil visage as a fascinated bird's gaze may be held by the glitter in the serpent's film-covered eye.

But horrid as the sight of the woman's transfigured features was, a greater horror showed behind her, for protruding half its length from the fire-grate of the blazing range was something no medical man could mistake after even a split-second's inspection. It was the unfleshed radius and ulna bones of a child's forearm, the wrist process still intact where the flesh and periosteum had not been entirely removed in dissection. On the tile-topped kitchen table beside the stove stood a wide-mouthed glass bowl filled with some liquid about the shade of new vinegar, and in this there lay a score of small, glittering white objects—a *child's teeth*. Neatly dressed, wound with cord like a roast, and, like a roast, placed in a wide, shallow pan, ready for cooking, was a piece of pale, veal-like meat.

"You—you," the woman cried in a queer, throaty voice, so low it was scarcely audible, yet so intense in its vibrations that I was reminded of the rumbling of an infuriated cat's cry.

"How—did—you—find...?"

"*Eh bien, Madame,*" de Grandin returned, struggling to speak with his customary cynical flippancy, but failing in the attempt, "how I did find out is of small moment. *What* I found, I think you will agree, is of the great import."

FOR AN INSTANT I thought the she-fiend would launch herself at him, but her attention lay elsewhere. Before any of us was aware of her move she had seized the glass vessel from the table, lifted it to her lips and all but emptied its contents down her throat in two frantic swallows. Next instant, frothing, writhing, contorting herself horribly, she lay on the tiled floor at our feet, her lips thickening and swelling with brownish blisters as the poison she had drunk regurgitated from her esophagus and welled up between her tightly set teeth.

"Good heavens!" I cried, bending forward instinctively to aid her, but

the Frenchman drew me back. "Let be, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked. "It is useless. She has taken enough hydrochloric acid to kill three men, and those movements of hers are only mechanical. Already she is unconscious, and in another five minutes she will have opportunity to explain her so strange life to One far wiser than we."

"Meantime," he assumed the cold, matter-of-fact manner of a morgue attendant performing his duties, "let us gather up these relics of the poor one"—he indicated the partially cremated arm-bones and the meat in the shining aluminum pan—"and preserve them for decent interment. I . . ."

A choking, gasping sound behind us turned our attention to the orphanage superintendent. Following more slowly through the window in de Grandin's wake, he had not at first grasped the significance of the horrors we had seen. The spectacle of the woman's suicide had unnerved him, but when de Grandin pointed to the relics in the stove and on the table, the full meaning of our discovery had fallen on him. With an inarticulate cry he had dropped to the floor in a dead faint.

"*Pardieu,*" the Frenchman exclaimed, crossing to the water-tap and filling a rumbler, "I think we had best bestow our services on the living before we undertake the care of the dead, Friend Trowbridge."

As he recrossed the kitchen to minister to the unconscious superintendent there came an odd, muffled noise from the room beyond. "*Qui vive?*" he challenged sharply, placing the glass of water on the dresser and darting through the door, his right hand dropping into his jacket pocket where the ready pistol lay. I followed at his heels, and, as he stood hesitating at the threshold, felt along the wall, found the electric switch and pressed it, flooding the room with light. On the couch beneath the window, bound hand and foot with strips torn from a silk scarf and gagged with another length of silk wound about her face, lay little Betsy, the child who had informed us she feared being hurt when we made our pretended inspection of the home's inmates the previous day.

"*Morbleu,*" de Grandin muttered as he liberated the little one from her bonds, "another?"

"Mother Martin came for Betsy and tied her up," the child informed us as she raised herself to a sitting posture. "She told Betsy she would send her to heaven with her papa and mamma, but Betsy must be good and not make a fuss when her hands and feet were tied."

She smiled vaguely at de Grandin.

"Why doesn't Mother Martin come for Betsy?" she demanded. "She said she would come and send me to heaven in a few minutes, but I

wanted and waited, and she didn't come, and the cloth over my face kept tickling my nose, and . . ."

"Mother Martin has gone away on business, *ma petite*," the Frenchman interrupted. "She said she could not send you to your papa and *maman*, but if you are a very good little girl you may go to them some day. Meantime — here is the best substitute I can find for heaven at this time, *chère*."

"WELL, OLD CHAP, I'll certainly have to admit you went right to the heart of the matter," I congratulated as we drove homeward through the paling dawn, "but I can't for the life of me figure out how you did it."

His answering smile was a trifle wan. The horrors we had witnessed at the matron's cottage had been almost too great a strain for even his iron nerve. "Partly it was luck," he confessed wearily, "and partly it was thought."

"When first we arrived at the home for orphans I had nothing to guide me, but I was convinced that the little ones had not wandered off voluntarily. The environment seemed too good to make any such hypothesis possible. Everywhere I looked I saw evidences of loving care, and faces which could be trusted. But somewhere, I felt, as an old wound feels the coming changes of the weather, there was something evil, some evil force working against the welfare of those poor ones. Where could it be and by whom was it exerted? 'This is for us to find out,' I tell me as I look over the attendants who were visible in the chapel."

"Gervaise, he is an old woman in trousers. Never would he hurt a living thing, no, not even a fly, unless it bit him first."

"Mere Martin, she was of a saintly appearance, but when I was presented to her I learn something which sets my brain to thinking. On the softness of her white hands are stains and callouses. Why? I hold her hand longer than convention required, and all the time I ask me, 'What have she done to put these baredness on her hands?'"

"To this I had no answer, so I bethought me perhaps my nose could tell what my sense of touch could not. When I raised her hand to my lips I made a most careful examination of it, and also I did smell. Trowbridge, my friend, I made sure those disfigurements were due to HCL — what you call hydrochloric acid in English."

"*Morbleu*, but this is extraordinary," I tell me. "Why should one who has no need to handle acid have those burns on her skin?"

"That are for you to answer in good time," I reply to me. And then

I temporarily forget the lady and her hands, because I am sure that Monsieur Gervaise desires to know what we say to the young children. *Eh bien*, I did do him an injustice there, but the wisest of us makes mistakes, my friend, and he gave me much reason for suspicion."

"When the little Betsy was answering my questions she tells me that she has seen a 'white lady,' tall and with flowing robes, like an angel, come into the dormitory where she and her companions slept on many occasions, and I have ascertained from previous questions that no one enters those sleeping quarters after the lights are out unless there is a specific need for a visit. What was I to think? Had the little one dreamed it, or has she seen this so mysterious 'white lady' on her midnight visits? It is hard to say where recollection stops and romance begins in children's tales, my friend, as you well know, but the little Betsy was most sure the 'white lady' had come only on those nights when her little companions vanished."

"Here we had something from which to reason, though the morsel of fact was small. However, when I talk further with the child, she informed me it was Mere Martin who had warned her against us, saying we would surely cut her tongue with a knife if she talked to us. This, again, was worthy of thought. But Monsieur Gervaise had been smelling at the door while we were interrogating the children, and he had also disapproved of our seeing them alone. My suspicion of him would not die easily, my friend; I was stubborn, and refused to let my mind take me where it would."

"So, as you know, when we had posted the four-footed sentry inside the children's door, I made sure we would catch a fish in our trap, and next morning I was convinced we had, for did not Gervaise wear his arm in a sling? Truly, he did."

"But at the laundry they showed me no torn pajamas of his while I found the gowns of both Mademoiselle Bosworth and Madame Martin torn as if the dog had bitten them. More mystery. Which way should I turn, if at all?"

"I FIND THAT Gervaise's window really had been broken, but that meant nothing; he might have done it himself in order to construct an alibi. Of the reason for Mademoiselle Bosworth's torn robe I could glean no trace; but behind my brain, at the very back of my head, something was whispering at me; something I could not hear, but which I knew was of importance."

"Then, as we drove away from the home, you mentioned the acid test."

My friend, those words of yours let loose the memory which cried aloud to me, but which I could not clearly understand. Of a suddenness I did recall the scene at luncheon, how Mademoiselle Bosworth declared Mere Martin ate no meat for six months, and how angry Madame Martin was at the mention of it. *Parbleu*, for six months the little ones had been disappearing—for six months Madame Martin had eaten no meat, yet she were plump and well-nourished. She had the look of a meat-eater!"

"Still," I protested, "I don't see how that put you on the track."

"No?" he replied. "Remember, my friend, how we stopped to interview the druggist. Why think you we did that?"

"Hanged if I know," I confessed.

"Of course not," he agreed with a nod. "But I know, 'Suppose,' I say to me, 'someone have eaten the flesh of these poor disappeared children? What would that one do with the bones?'"

"He would undoubtedly bury or burn them," I reply.

"Very good, but more likely he would burn them, since buried bones may be dug up, and burned bones are only ashes; but what of the teeth? They would resist fire such as can be had in the ordinary stove, yet surely they might betray the murderer."

"But of course," I admit, "but why should not the murderer reduce those teeth with acid, hydrochloric acid, for instance?"

"Ah-ba," I tell me, "that are the answer. Already you have one whose hands are acid-stained without adequate explanation, also one who eats no meat at table. Find out, now, who have bought acid from some neighborhood drug store, and perhaps you will have the answer to your question."

"THE ITALIAN GENTLEMAN who keeps the pharmacy tells me that a lady of very kindly mien comes to him frequently and buys hydrochloric acid, which she calls muriatic acid, showing she are not a chemist, but knows only the commercial term for the stuff. She is a tall, large lady with white hair and kind blue eyes."

"It are Mere Martin!" I tell me. "She are the 'white lady' of the orphanage!"

"Then I consult my memory some more, and decide we shall investigate this night."

"Listen, my friend: In the Paris *Surete* we have the history of many remarkable cases, not only from France, but other lands as well. In the year 1849 a miscreant named Swiatek was haled before the Austrian courts on a charge of cannibalism, and in the same year there was another somewhat similar case where a young English lady—a girl of

refinement and careful education and nurture—was the defendant. Neither of these was naturally fierce or bloodthirsty, yet their crimes were undoubted. In the case of the beggar we have a transcription of his confession. He did say in part: When first driven by dire hunger to eat of human flesh he became, as the first horrid morsel passed his lips, as it were a ravening wolf. He did rend and tear the flesh and growl in his throat like a brute beast the while. From that time forth he could stomach no other meat, nor could he abide the sight or smell of it. Beef, pork or mutton filled him with revulsion. And had not Madame Martin exhibited much the same symptoms at table? Truly.

"Things of a strange nature sometimes occur, my friend. The mind of man is something of which we know but little, no matter how learnedly we prate. Why does one man love to watch a snake creep, while another goes into ecstasies of terror at sight of a reptile? Why do some people hate the sight of a cat, while others fear a tiny, harmless mouse as though he were the devil's brother-in-law? None can say, yet these things are. So I think it is with crime."

"This Madame Martin was not naturally cruel. Though she killed and ate her charges, you will recall how she hounded the little Betsy with silk, and did it in such a way as not to injure her, or even to make her uncomfortable. That meant mercy? By no means, my friend. Myself, I have seen peasant women in my own land weep upon and fondle the rabbit they were about to kill for *déjeuner*. They did love and pity the poor little beast which was to die, but *que voulez vous?* One must eat."

"Some thought like this, I doubt not, was in Madame Martin's mind as she committed murder. Somewhere in her nature was a thing we can not understand; a thing which made her crave the flesh of her kind for food, and she answered the call of that craving even as the taker of drugs is helpless against his vice."

"*Tiens*, I am convinced that if we searched her house we should have the explanation of the children's disappearance, and you yourself witnessed what we saw. It was well she took the poison when she did. Death, or incarceration in a madhouse, would have been her portion had she lived, and"—he shrugged—"the world is better off without her."

"U'm, I see how you worked it, out," I replied, "but will Mr. Richards be satisfied? We've accounted for one of the children, because we found part of her skeleton in the fire, but can we swear the rest disappeared in the same manner? Richards will want a statistical table of facts before he parts with three thousand dollars, I imagine."

"*Parbleu*, will he, indeed?" de Grandin answered, something like his

usual elfish grin spreading across his face. "What think you would be the result were we to notify the authorities of the true facts leading up to Madame Martin's suicide? Would not the newspapers make much of it. *Cordieu*, I shall say they would and the home for orphans over which Monsieur Richards presides so pompously would receive what you call 'the black eye.' *Morbleu*, my friend, the very black eye, indeed! No, no, me, I think Monsieur Richards will gladly pay us the reward, nor haggle over terms.

"Meanwhile, we are at home once more. Come, let us drink the cognac."

"Drink cognac?" I answered. "Why, in heaven's name?"

"*Parbleu*, we shall imbibe a toast to the magnificent three thousand dollars Monsieur Richards pays us tomorrow morning!"

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WORLD-WIDE ADVENTURE

The Gray People

by John Campbell Haywood

Introduction

by Sam Moskowitz

MODERN READERS first became aware of *The Gray People* by John Campbell Haywood in the first

issue (November, 1936) of the short-lived magazine *THE WITCH'S TALES*. The title of that magazine

Suddenly they were there, and the folk around dreaded the sight of them . . .

was derived from a popular radio program of the same name, first broadcast May, 1931, which presented listeners with as diabolical an array of supernatural and horror chillers as have ever been heard. The program was on once-a-week and the bedlamite catalogue of terrors was written by Alonzo Dean Cole and narrated by the ancient Witch, Nancy, usually opening with a hideous cackle and a preface addressed to her coal-black cat: "Hundred and eleven years old I be tonight, Satan."

The magazine was larger-than-letter-size, printed on pulp paper, and died with its second issue, dated December, 1936. The feature of each issue was a fictionalization of a radio script from "The Witch's Tales" program, adapted by Alonzo Dean Cole, who also was listed as the "editor" of the magazine—though it is more likely that the necessary duties were performed by managing editor, Tom Chadburn.

Though crudely printed, and the names of the authors virtually unknown to contemporary readers, some of

the stories in the magazine were of surprising quality. They appeared to be reprints, but there was no credit line on any of them.

Research indicates that some, if not all, were from the pages of the American edition of *PEARSON'S MAGAZINE*, an outstanding publication of fact and fiction started in 1896 by the British publisher C. Arthur Pearson as a very successful copy of *THE STRAND*. *PEARSON'S* ran a great deal of fantasy and science fiction, including some of the finest works of H. G. Wells; and *The Gray People* appeared in its March, 1906 issue. When reprinted in *THE WITCH'S TALES*, the title was changed to *Phantom of the Links*.

Several other of the stories from *THE WITCH'S TALES* have been traced to *PEARSON'S*. *The Death Trap*, a remarkable horror story of a prehistoric monster in the sewers of New York, written by George Daulton was initially published in its March, 1908 issue; *The Monster of Lake La Metrie* by Warden Allan Curtis, a highly-advanced

concept of the transplantation of the brain of a man into the body of a prehistoric reptile originally appeared in *PEARSON'S* for September, 1899. Both of these were published in the second, and last issue of *THE WITCH'S TALES*.

John Campbell Haywood, author of *The Gray People* has left little record in the literary world, but his golf-course ghosts are modern spirits and offered something different and accomplished in the supernatural story.



"IS THIS THE Doctor's?" asked Hartley, as the carriage stopped. Through the darkness only a small gate was visible. The house beyond lay in the shadow of trees that silhouetted their tall heads against the night pall of the sky. No light shone but the reflected gleam of the carriage lamps. There was no sound, no voice of the night in the village street, only the rattling of the horse trappings. It was long after midnight. The footman opened the carriage door and Hartley repeated his question in a low tone.

"Yessir—Doctor Stout's sir!"

"Ring quickly! If the doctor is in ask him to light up, and then you come and help me to get Mr. Thorne in. He seems to be sleeping heavily!"

It was not many minutes before there were lights in the lower rooms and the sound of a figure wrapped in a dressing-gown could be seen talking to the footman.

Hartley meanwhile was trying to awaken his companion. When the footman reached the carriage he was half lifting, half dragging an apparently unconscious figure toward the little gate.

"He is still half asleep," he said to the footman, in a low tone.

Between them they carried him up the pathway. The doctor's office was by this time fully lighted and it seemed to them that the glare of the electric lights brought some helpful movement from the man they bore between them and placed in the one deep seated chair in the room.

Hartley was a stranger to Dr. Stout. In fact he had only been in the village a few days as Thorne's guest, spending most of his time on the golf links. The doctor and Thorne, however, were old friends, and it was with a quick note of anxiety in the former's voice that he asked:

"What's the matter? What's the matter? Has there been an accident?"

"None at all! None!—That I call an accident! He tripped and fell on the golf links a short time ago. He..."

"On the golf links! At this hour?" The doctor, without listening to Hartley's reply, quickly undid the heavy overcoat and head wrappings of the now thoroughly inert man. After holding his ear to Thorne's chest for a moment he said, with a keen look at Hartley:

"Help me to lift him to that sofa—at once!"

Hartley did as he was told and then sank back in the doctor's chair whilst the grave-eyed practitioner applied restoratives. Doctor Stout appeared each moment more anxious. Saturating a sponge with ammonia, so strong that Hartley felt the effect of the fumes, he held it for an instant to his patient's nostrils. There was a sharp contraction, a convulsive

movement of the whole frame that caused the doctor to rise from his stooping position. Thorne sighed deeply. Feeling sure that consciousness was returning Hartley began a torrent of explanatory words.

"Not now! Not now!" Doctor Stout spoke brusquely, again bending over Thorne. Then he turned and said something to Hartley in a low tone. Hartley sprang from his chair, answering almost fiercely:

"It is not possible!"

"It is a fact, the man is dead!" replied the doctor, who went quickly to the telephone.

THE MORNING PREVIOUS to the events related broke cold and gray over the Downs. The golf links, a nine-hole course of wonderful natural beauty, was blanketed in a bank of fog that had rolled up from the southeast during the night. What little wind there was served now and again to lift the veil and to reveal wisps of mist scurrying across the fair greens, forming in their drift, weird fantastic shapes. From the Shelter, an artistic structure which stood upon a rocky knoll overlooking the first and home stretch of the course, the gray draperies of the fog seemed to hang more thickly about the copse surrounding "the graveyard." The "graveyard" was

the resting place of many a lost ball—the penalty of a sliced drive from the seventh tee.

At ten o'clock Hartley, the only occupant of the Shelter, knocked out the ashes from his pipe on the low stone coping and peered gloomily into the fog. The first tee was dimly visible.

He was an ardent golfer, and gathered no new thoughts beyond golfing disabilities from the mist. He had no inspiration from the drift of vapor that hung over the links, and saw nothing, in fact, that was not tedious and irritating in the vagaries of the fog sprays as they curled and spiraled over the fair greens. His mind was on golf. He wanted to play and his partner, Thorne, was not on time. He execrated the fog and his recalcitrant partner, and then picking up his bag decided to go to the caddy house. As he left the Shelter his eyes wistfully turned to the first tee. There were people there, who had come unnoticed by him; people he had not heard or seen coming up the slope, but through the mist their outline was now distinctly visible—a man and a woman.

"By Jove," he said, "a woman, and in this weather; plucky, whoever they are! A man might, but a woman, too!—Phew!"

He stood, a silent watcher, and

saw, although he could not hear what was said, that they were apparently in dispute over the honor, as both stood upon the square of the tee.

Hartley drew closer, a few feet only, and as he did so, the woman—a figure in a long gray cloak, stepped back from the tee, still with her back to him. The man's form, looming large in the fog, went through the motions of driving, a full clean swing and follow through apparently, but there was no sound. Then the woman quickly followed with a drive, sweet and clean for distance, and the two, leaving the tee, were swallowed in the bank of fog. Hartley watched intently—he listened for voices but the silence was unbroken except for the stirring of the leaves in the grove about the Shelter. He stood for some moments with a cold chill creeping over him, and then went back, loath to leave the chance of a game, if others had gone out.

"Must ask Thorne who she is," he muttered to himself, refilling and lighting his pipe. "A girl in a gray cloak and a man—yes, a man with a grouch." That seemed to him all he knew of them and the grouch seemed evident from the way they had acted upon the tee and their silence when leaving it.

"What rot it is," he said to him-

self. "a woman going out in this drizzling weather."

The rattling sticks in a caddy bag coming from the slope leading to the caddy house signaled the approach of Thorne.

"Hullo, old chap," he said, throwing down his sticks near the tee and hastening into the Shelter. "Want to go out? Sorry to keep you waiting, but I'm on the Green's Committee, you know, and had some things to attend to as we have a match on with Litchfield to-morrow—but now I'm ready if you are. Ready day, isn't it?"

"I'm ready, but we had better wait for the people ahead to get out of distance! They've only just driven off."

"People ahead? Who is out except ourselves?"

"Don't know; was going to ask you who they are. A man and a woman just drove off, however, and cannot be much over the brow of the hill."

"A man and a woman!" Thorne looked incredulous. "Who, on a day like this . . ."

"Don't know, I tell you," Hartley broke in impatiently, "but I saw them drive off. A man with a grouch and a woman in a gray dress!"

"Gray!" Thorne strode excitedly nearer the speaker. "Gray, did you say, and a woman?"

"Certainly, a tall man and a woman in gray. They . . ."

HARTLEY WAS NOT allowed to finish.

"The 'Gray People'!" Thorne grasped Hartley's arm. "Come! Never mind the first hole; we can catch them about the gully at the second! Come! They are wraiths, man! Golfing spirits! Ghosts! Anything you like to call them, unreal and intangible, but a part of the history of this course. I have wanted to see them for years—sought them time and again without success! Come! Come!"

Down the slope across the fair green to the second tee the golfers hurried, stumbling and slipping upon the wet grass, Thorne, as they went telling again that these they followed were spirits of a bygone age. He grew almost incoherent in his excitement and Hartley listened, incredulous and composed.

There was no sign of any players on the links. The second, third and fourth greens were hastily searched. At times they hid in the dripping bushes and waited—then hurried on again, Thorne insistent, whilst Hartley grew rebellious and weary.

The sixth hole is a carry from the drive, about one hundred and sixty-five yards, to a sunken green, a pit about forty feet square sur-

rounded by shrubbery except upon the side facing the tee. Hartley and Thorne crossed the fair green to the elevation over the pit and saw that, although the fog had perceptibly lightened on the higher levels, it still hung thick and impenetrable in the lower reaches.

"They cannot have passed here," said Hartley, "and I'll bet you they've cut the course! This is a wild ghost chase and I'm for heading in!"

Thorne's answer, a plea for seriousness, was stayed by the sound of voices—voices that seemed to come from beneath the sea of vapor lying almost at their feet.

"It is the 'Gray People' I know it!" he whispered hoarsely. "Listen!"

His excitement choked him until Hartley, mentally cool, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"It must be here," began Thorne again, "that they . . ."

"Man! be still! Look!" It was Hartley, calmly pointing to the spindle that rose out of the gray carpet in the center of the green. It rose, as though floating in the air—then sank—to appear again, swaying violently. As it swayed there came shrill voices from the pit, voices that broke sharply in the thick silence, and that swelled as though in anger. The fog muffled the words, but there seemed

a hideous meaning in the spindle that swayed above the sounds.

As the men strained their eyes and ears to penetrate the veil, there came from beneath it a cry horrible in its intensity. It mounted, and mounting filled all the sides of the hollow above which they stood. It hung quivering in the air above them and then—it seemed hours to them—it grew fainter and fainter until it died in the rustling of leaves in the surrounding shrubbery.

"What fools we are!" said Hartley, "to be scared by . . ."

"Hush! Look there!"

Thorne pointed into the pit. A vagrant breeze had swept the green clear of fog. There was nothing there but the spindle lying on the grass beside the hole—a spindle bent and crumpled from misuse.

"YOU ARE hopelessly skeptical," said Thorne after dinner. With the curtains drawn in his cozy bachelor quarters at Churley, the two men were resting after an arduous day. "You have seen more than most men, yet you don't believe in the 'Gray People'. As an investigator you lack faith with more than half the evidence before you. To me," he continued, "the opportunity this morning afforded seemed to be one for which I have waited a good many years, and I am frankly disappointed at

the outcome of our chase through the mist. I have been wondering if it was your spirit, antagonistic to the ones we sought, that prevented our seeing more!"

"That's right! Blame it on me!" exclaimed the other. "All that was to be seen I saw! A man and a woman driving off into the mist! It was you, you must remember, who insisted upon our following these players. The result does not seem to me unusual. They probably found the dampness too much for them and harked back to the caddy house after playing the first hole!"

"You still think they were real people?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Hartley was amused at the insistence of the other. "Real enough! Odd perhaps—but not ghosts!" He laughed openly.

For some minutes Thorne seemed to be weighing something in his mind. He was wondering whether he should more fully confide in his companion and brave his further ridicule.

"You forget," he said at last, "the voices on the sixth green! You forget..."

"Nonsense," interrupted Hartley. "A fog exaggerates everything, even sound! What we thought were voices were probably stray birds—bluejays, perhaps—or animals

quarreling under the misty veil! They disappeared in a very natural manner when the fog lifted and they saw us, or, more likely, heard us above the row they made themselves. We must have made some noise breathing heavily and..."

"But the spindle! You saw that!"

"I thought I did, and by Jove, the thought wasn't pleasant! I'll admit my mind ran on murder for the moment but then one can't explain everything, you know! That was a bit spooky, but for that there is an explanation—probably fog mirage, if there can be such a thing, seems most likely!"

"I might accept your view," Thorne answered, "if the Downs had no legendary history, but they have—they have," he repeated, "and one that I want to incorporate in the book of folklore I have in preparation, but I want to substantiate it! I want to bring it to as strengthened by a personal experience of my own. You know the tale of the phantom dory off Thatcher's Island, the Gloucester people tell about. I saw that myself, night after night!"

It was impossible for Hartley to underestimate the earnestness of Thorne; he liked it but his own feelings were not shaken. He had traveled extensively; he loved all

legends for their poetic imagery, and he liked to read without trying to believe. In his travels he had seen many examples of occult mysticism, had seen them exposed or heard them explained. He was convinced that every apparent visitation from the spirit world was capable of materialistic interpretation.

Thorne understood thoroughly these views of his friend without sharing them, and so was loath to go more fully into the tale of the "Gray People" as he had heard and understood it. To a man of his nature, however, the indifference, amounting almost to ridicule, on Hartley was irritating.

"I wish I could convince you," he began. "It seems so much easier to believe a tale that many tell than to think people gullible and foolish."

Hartley reached for the decanter, slowly and methodically mixed himself a drink, and then asked:

"If there is a yarn that will not strain your imagination in the telling, tell it, but do not pin me down to any belief in it!"

"I didn't invent it," Thorne answered quickly. "I can only tell you the common talk amongst the settlers! Shall I? Would it really interest you?"

"Fire away! I'll be interested if unconvinced."

"IT WAS probably forty years ago, when a Scotchman traveling through this country first noticed that the Downs were a natural golf links. From the day Dugal Macferison saw them they have not been touched as to formation. In fact but a little cutting of the bushes and seeding of the putting greens was needed to make the perfect course it is today. You can imagine, therefore, the impressions of the man, a born golfer, when his eyes lit upon an undoubted golf course so far from his home greens.

"There was no golf in or about these parts at that time. The game had made no start in this country. It was some years later that golf took hold upon the American people. But Macferison was, as I have said, a golfer, once of the Tom Morris school, and the sight of this natural course stirred in him all the blood of a generation of golfers. It was not long before he had holes made in the smoother greens for putting, and with driver and brassie and cleft was making solitary rounds, to the wonder of the native element who watched, but would not play. One day he went back to the village with a strange tale of other players, a

man and a woman. The players had come out of the mist when he was looking for a lost ball in the gully at the second hole. He had called to them and they had not answered. Then he had gone toward them and had seen that they were not of his day or his people. They were dressed in gray, but it was not a style of dress he knew. The man had a loose cloak that opened with the swing of his stride and showed a frilled shirt, topping breeches, with buckles at the knee—buckles which glistened in the wet fog. The woman, who followed, had a bonnet hanging over her shoulder by a broad ribbon. A mass of tangled hair hid her face and she wore a mantle of gray so long it dragged the bracken as she passed. They played golf, but with shapeless clubs, and balls that gleamed dully in the air with a pale phosphorescence.

"It was old Nathaniel Curtis, the innkeeper, who sounded the deeps of the Scotchman's tale.

"Who were they?" he asked, sternly. Then without waiting for a reply continued, looking about him at the little crowd about the big box stove. "Ye cannot tell! No man can! but I say I've seen the 'Gray People!' Ye've seen the same as many a man hez afore ye, but there's no man afore this as

hez said they were playin' a game! Are ye sure of this?"

"Man," it is said the Scotchman answered, 'wull ye say a' canna tell t'game o' gowf? I dinna ken who the 'Gray Folks' are, but a brassie! Lad! An' a braw approach tae th' green—Hoot!"

"Tut! Tut!" the innkeeper broke in. "The 'Gray People' have walked the Downs for years. Many a farmer has seen 'em, aye an' many a man kep away from them same Downs for fear o' the sight o' them. 'Tis said hy some that they never go west o' the meadow that leads to the green pit, but that they go into the pit! There's cries him heard, cries that scairt and hindered the breath o' them that heard!"

"I'm trying," said Thorne, at this point, "to give you an idea of the reception of the Scotchman's tale at the inn and to repeat, as it has been repeated to me a score of times, the conversation that ensued. The townfolks, you see, knew of the 'Gray People.' It was the Scotchman who discovered they were golfers."

"Go on," answered Hartley. "Tell it your own way! What happened next?"

"Then," went on Thorne, "the innkeeper asked the Scotchman if he had followed them any part of the way."

"I'm no a fu!" Macferson replied. "'Tis no ma way tae be following speerats!"

"'Tis well it isn't," Curtis Wild told him, "there's deaths laid to their door!" With this statement made as impressive as possible and allowed to sink in, he continued, "Ye speak o' little balls they played with! There's them as says balls o' fire can be seen o' nights risin' an' fallin' on the Downs. Like as not 'tis the Gray ones out. D'ye remember Rogers?"

"The innkeeper's sudden question was answered by a solemn nod of assent from one or two.

"Rogers," went on the innkeeper, "lost a sheep, an' looking for it late one night, he saw them same lights and follered 'em. Curiosity it was, an' it done him!"

"Is the mon deid?" The Scotchman is said to have asked in an awe-stricken voice, fearful of the answer.

"Aye! dead, an' there's others! There's many says the lights bring death, but may be if it's just a game they're playin', as you say—well! I dunno! It's a fool game monkeyin' with them things. I'm only tellin' ye what some thinks!"

"That is about the end of it," said Thorne, "but knowing all this talk, this belief of the natives in the 'Gray People' of the Downs,

you cannot wonder at my anxiety to see something for myself!"

For some minutes Hartley was silent. "Old tales," he exclaimed. "Old wives' tales, built of fog and mist sprays! Phosphorescent gleams in the night! The same the sailor sees in corpsoants upon the yards and stays of his ship! In fact there is some similarity in the fatality supposed to follow in each case—a fatality never more than a coincidence! The sailor says, you know, 'tis death to the man that the light shines on,' so they don't go aloft if they can help it when the Corpo Santo is perched upon the yard-arms. I've seen them many times in my old seafaring days—ay! and had their ghastly glare in my face too—yet am I here!"

"Here! and still skeptical I see!" Thorne smiled. "Will nothing ever change, I wonder, your prosaic and materialistic tendency?"

"Yes!" Hartley rose suddenly from his chair and went to the window. Pulling the curtains aside he looked out into the night. "You shall show me the lights!"

"DO YOU really mean it?" said Hartley, peering out into the black blue of the moonless night from the carriage window. "Do you really mean it?"

"Mean what?"—neither of the men had spoken since the carriage had left the house. It was now slowly mounting the up-drive of the private way to the links. The bright end of a cigarette in Thorne's hand glowed fitfully with the indraught of his lips and then, as he threw it out, made a bright parabola to the ground. "Mean what! Do you think an old wives' tale would draw me to the Downs at this hour if I did not know that there are some things beyond your ken—or mine! If I did not believe that the world holds many in so-called spirit form, treading the paths that lie between heaven and . . ."

"Boosh!" Hartley put out his hand to stay the flow of words—words that in him raised only decided antagonism. "I've no doubt you think you believe in all this—you study and you lecture and you believe—or bring yourself to a semblance of belief—but you don't really! You can't! The thing is too flagrantly a case carrying with it all sorts of ideas and the Scotch verdict 'not proven . . .'"

"We go," Thorne said, with an aggressive positiveness in his voice, "to prove it! Here we are, and I wish . . ."

"What?"

"That for your sake we may see the lights, may speak to the

'Gray People' and—and," he repeated, "for once in your life you may exchange a doubt for faith!"

The carriage stopped under a grove behind the caddy house, and the two men walked quickly and silently across the fair green to the Shelter.

For fully half an hour the two men sat and waited, alert to anything that in the dark of the night seemed a portent of what one of them at least wished—they both wished in fact—one for the proving, the other for the disproving of the idea that lay uppermost. Hartley had begun the watch with light and trivial expression, to be quickly stifled, however, by Thorne's earnest, somber mood. From where they sat the first tee was dimly visible—its outline a blot beyond the outer wall of the knoll which bore the Shelter. There was nothing depressing in the outlook, but it imposed silence—a silence unbroken except for the champing of the horses in the woods back of the caddy house and an occasional call of a night owl or flutter of a dreaming bird. Hartley was beginning to get uneasy. The chair he sat in was hard and whilst he did it as noiselessly as possible, he constantly changed his position and at last said:

"Let's give it up, old chap!

There's nothing in it. We've given it a fair trial but tonight is not . . ."

He ceased abruptly. Clearly and distinctly on the first tee glowed a small light—a light of pale phosphorescence—greenish and uncanny!

"Look! Thorne! Wake up! What's that?"

Thorne had been dozing for a moment. Hartley's hand on his arm awakened him to instant alertness.

"The phantom ball!" he whispered.

EVEN AS THEY both watched, the disk of light rose from the tee—out into the black blue of the heavens it soared, straight down the fair green toward the first hole.

Both men were on their feet.

"Watch!" It was Thorne's voice hoarse and insistent. "Watch! The other!"

A pale blue light appeared on the tee. For a moment it flickered and then followed, though with apparently weaker force and direction, the first ball's flight over the course.

There was a rush of air as both men left the Shelter, Hartley in the lead. Instinctively the two drew together and Hartley's arm closed about Thorne.

"Let's keep together," he said,

"and follow! Follow until I know!"

There was a change in the attitude of the two. Hartley was excited to the verge of recklessness. Thorne, calm and deliberate, investigating a truth that had been to him always a truth, and not wishing to risk a false step.

"Hold on," he said. "Hold on! If they are playing golf the balls cannot be more than over the brow of the hill."

Arm linked in arm they paced to the brow of the slight declivity that the length of a fair drive from the tee—

"There they are!" The jerk of Hartley's arm almost threw Thorne off his feet. "See! Both of them."

Thorne broke loose and rushing down the slope was soon within reach of the lights—the one showing greenish white, the other and nearer one, pale blue upon the dark of the grass. As Thorne came to the first it disappeared—went out, leaving only the baleful gleam of the greenish one, about ten yards beyond where Thorne had stopped. He advanced toward it, and Hartley could see that he stooped as though hoping to catch it in his hands. As he neared it the light for an instant flickered, then darkness where it lay, whilst the pale blue light returned and shone

with gentler glow upon the ground he had passed over. Hartley stood still and watched. The night, dark as it was, yet touched with the clearness of a cloudless sky everything above the floor line with some distinctness, and he could see the efforts of the investigator as he passed from place to place, at one time seemingly within reach of the glimmering disks, the next moment encircled only in the shadow of the fair green.

"Come back," he called softly. "Cannot you see," he said, as Thorne reached his side, "that they are Will-o'-the-wisps that you cannot touch? See, there they are now!"

As he spoke the blue ball rose from the ground and dropped short, the green one following almost at once to a place within a long putting distance of where both the watchers knew the hole to be.

Having learned his lesson the first stretch of the course, Thorne was content to follow, without attempting to investigate too closely, the game of the phantom balls to the sixth green. There was no halt in the game; each disk rose from the tee and fell with noticable equality—the greenish-hued being as a rule in advance on the drive, but the strokes—which the watchers were able to count—to putting distance being rarely of remark-

able difference until the sixth hole.

This was a stretch of meadow-land, a short drive to a sunken green. The experiences of the morning were not forgotten. It was beyond here the tankkeeper had said the "Gray People" had never been seen. It was here that Hartley and Thorne had heard voices—the one said of animal life, the other convinced of some supernatural agency.

It was therefore with something like consternation they watched the drive and saw the green disk, to their imagination more baleful in its weird gleam as it lay upon the tee than before, rise in the air and take an erratic direction. It fell far to the right of its true course into spinney. Both the watchers, being golfers, recognized at once an impossible approach to the putting green.

Slowly they made their way to the knoll overlooking the pit. The blue ball played a second time, lay in the center of the green. For some moments it glimmered in the shadows, a solitary light, glowing gently, on a field of velvet—then beside it there lay another—a ball like a clot of blood—an effulgent mass of deep red which seemed to drip a light on to the carpet of the pit!

An unreasoning terror shook the two men. Clutching each other

they stood and looked. As they looked, it seemed to them that the pit became filled with figures that swayed and fought about the pale blue light, always with the blood-red light upon them. There rose on the air a cry—a cry repeated and breaking into the silence until every breath around them bore some wail of agonized spirit form. And then—they ran—ran full of the panic of fear, clutching at their breaths, sobbing with an awful horror of the things they left behind. Once Thorne stumbled and fell; it was at the edge of the "graveyard," and Hartley helped him to his feet and over the fair greens to the caddy house. In there were light and people Thorne dashed in and fell panting to the floor.

There was no mark of hurt upon him but he asked to be driven to the doctor's.

IT WAS three years after the death of Thorne when Hartley returned to America. He had gone away immediately following the request at which he had repeated the legend as told him by Thorne, and had given in detail all the circumstances leading to the fatal end of his friend. That he had been looked upon with some suspicion he knew, but the verdict cleared him and he left the place, bearing

a burden of thought he sought to lighten by traveling abroad.

In the library of a mutual friend shortly after his return, he first saw *Legendary Pathways*, by Professor Albion Thorne, published by his literary executor about a year after his death. Turning to the index he saw that the last chapter, written by the executor, told of Thorne's death and the manner of it, and of the "Gray People" and of the phantom balls, but—and he thanked God for it—there was no mention of his own name, only that "a friend was with him." He turned other pages idly until he found under a chapter headed "The Con- tagion of Thought" this passage:

"There have been believers in legends throughout the ages and always will be. It is a belief which, inoculating childhood, saturates the blood and if not early eliminated, formulates in manhood an almost overpowering faith in mysticism and makes many followers of occultism and its attendant so-called sciences. It is quite possible to become so imbued with the apparent truth in a legend that in some natures the things sought to be seen, are made visible. Atmospheres are created, not only around the investigator, but through the strength of his belief extending to the senses and mental attitudes of his companions. This transmission

of thought from one will create a panic of fear, or the exultation of great joy in the minds of many who have no knowledge of the actual cause of fear or reason for joy. Then the imagination will operate to see and hear as the imagination of the instigator of such emotions is seeing or hearing."

Hartley closed the book . . .

"I cannot believe it," he muttered, "the thing is impossible—with me!"

For some moments he sat brooding over the trend of thought the book had conjured to his mind.

"Besides," he said, throwing the book upon the table, "I saw the 'Gray People' before Thorne did—I saw them before he came up the slope."

He went to the window and looked out . . .

"Dark," he said, "dark and foggy!"—then suddenly he stretched out his hands toward the darkness.

"Thorne," he called, "Thorne! if you are there—if you can speak to me—tell me—show me if you can—must I too believe?"

There was no answer.

The Reckoning

August Derleth was the first to take the lead in our Winter issue, to be momentarily nosed out by Ambrose Bierce; and then both of these fine authors gave place to the winner, although contention among the three remained lively. Here are the finals.

(1) *Bride of the Peacock*, E. Hoffmann Price; (2) *Those Who Seek*, August Derleth; (3) *The Man Who Chained the Lightning*, Paul Ernst; (4) *John Bartine's Watch*, Ambrose Bierce; (5) *Nice Old House*, Donna Tolson; (6) *The Pet of Mrs. Latham*, Robert Barbour Johnson.

For a rarity, not a single story drew any "dislike" votes, so those authors who came out behind can justly feel that their efforts were liked, even though others were liked more.

And Then No More...

by Jay Tyler

IN THE LAST ANALYSIS, you had to have luck. Abner Vincent was thinking as he parked the station wagon and put a dime into the parking meter with the careless abandon of a man about to undergo an amputation. You could load dice or stack cards in your favor, but not too obviously, even then there was a chance that the other man might take a trick or two, if he didn't discover what you'd done.

He saw Ray Harris coming down the street and grappled with an impulse to duck into the barber shop. Ray wasn't on speaking terms with Amarillo, and wouldn't follow him in. On the other hand, Amarillo would try to talk him into a haircut he wasn't intending to get for three more days.

A curse, which seems to be fulfilled continually, can be a fearful thing—also, a profitable one, if you look at it from another angle . . .

"Morning, Mr. Vincent," Ray said ingenuously, and Abner groaned inwardly beneath his carefully-groomed smile and reached for his wallet.

"Morning, Ray. Sorry I was out when you finished the windows." Bills had to be paid, because it cost more in bad feelings when you didn't pay them than the actual money involved, but just the same . . . He opened the wallet carefully. "What do I owe you?"

"Exactly seven dollars, Mr. Vincent." Abner counted out seven bills carefully, then reached into his change pocket for two quarters and two dimes. The failure to tip made people call you a miser, but if you paid a small tip for nearly everything, you were just a little eccentric. One year he'd kept a record and found that the difference between a ten percent tip for all services, and a fifteen or twenty percent tip where it was usually expected, and none where it could be by-passed entirely, saved him thirteen dollars and eighty-seven and one-half cents. Since he forced himself to be generous on half-cent calculations, he called it a saving of \$13.88.

"Seen Carl, Ray?"

Harris nodded over his shoulder. "Yeah. Playing cards with Joe Pelcher in Dalv's. Looked like he was getting sore when I left. Filled an inside straight, and Joe had a full house."

"Thanks." Abner smiled and put his hand in his pocket to touch the little medallion he had carefully abstracted from the chain Carl Willard wore about his neck, the night before. The risk had been that Carl would notice it was missing, then Abner would have to help him find it before he went out. But the odds were good that Carl would have noticed it by now. That would be bad enough luck, but it would be worse to go back to the house for it once he left without it. Abner congratulated himself for helping his nephew augment his stock of superstitions by adding this one to the already sizeable pile. He hadn't been sure at the time as to exactly when and where he would make use of it, but every bit helped.

So Carl was having bad luck. Abner pondered the question as he strolled along, smiling mechanically at people he met, as to whether the boy had discovered the loss or not. Drawing to fill an inside straight argued he hadn't; but, on the other hand, Carl often got reckless when he just suspected that luck was against him. Up to a point, this was fine — but it had to be controlled. It was time to bear down about the curse. Perhaps tonight . . .

HE WAVED TO patrolman Tench as he passed the fruit stand,

then stopped as Dalv's door across the street burst open and Carl Willard and Joe Pelcher boiled out, fists swinging.

They were pretty well matched, Abner thought. Joe was little heavier, but Carl had the speed and the reflexes, so long as he didn't think he was licked from the start. As Abner watched, and Tench looked up, then started for the pair, Carl weaved, bobbed, ducked neatly under a powerful right and landed a sharp left that sent Joe Pelcher reeling. He started forward to follow up his advantage, and tripped over an uneven spot in the sidewalk. In recovering, his hand went to his shirt, and . . .

And the transformation was something to watch, even as Tench yelled "Break it up!" Before Tench got there, Pelcher had recovered; he knocked Carl into the policeman's arms.

Tench in action was also something to watch, Abner thought. In what looked like one motion he had Carl Willard shoved against the wall, and Joe Pelcher, coming in for another punch was straightarmed back. "Break it up, I said."

That did it. Neither contestant wanted to tangle with the patrolman. Abner came forward as Tench invited them to accompany him to the station. "They haven't done any damage, sir," he said. "I'll take Carl home."

"Not before seeing Judge Cave, Mr. Vincent." Tench's tone was friendly and respectful, but firm as Abner had expected.

He nodded at his nephew, who was shaking his head. "You shouldn't have gone out without your lucky piece, lad," he said. "Go along with Mr. Tench now, I'll bail you out." He reached in his pocket and drew forth the medallion. "Here, better put it back on before something really bad happens."

Carl Willard took the medallion, still shaking his blond head. "Thanks," he said. "Guess it's my own fault. I should have checked it this morning."

Considering the number of objects attached to the little chain, it wasn't surprising that the quarter-inch disc hadn't been missed. Abner watched the trio head toward the station, smiled as Carl pointedly walked around a ladder, then turned back toward the station wagon. Yes, you had to have luck, he thought — but you couldn't pin everything on it . . .

ONE TOOK A chance, after trying to make sure everything was running right — and sometimes you lost. Abner Vincent remembered the sinking feeling he'd had when the telephone rang yesterday afternoon, ten minutes earlier than he'd been expecting it. He'd started to

chew Brindley out right away. "I told you always to call at two-thirty or later . . ."

The reply that cut in to his reproof kept him from finishing the sentence, and when he put the phone down a few minutes later, his face was pale Monday, the gamble had seemed like a sure thing; then, a little more than twenty-four hours later, he'd lost thirty thousand dollars, which could never be made up. It could only be covered up, and the one person who might prevent that was slated for elimination. What made Abner Vincent pale was the thought that the action he'd been planning all along was now urgent and necessary. Somehow that took the icing off the cake.

But—he was ready; that was the good part. He just had to push things a little, to put the next phase of the operation into motion now instead of building up toward it a little more artistically, savoring a few in-between steps. Since the best-laid plans for murder always entailed risk, he'd wanted to enjoy the utmost in satisfaction from the preliminaries.

It had been such a fascinating game, pretending to scoff gendly at his nephew's superstitions at times, to be irritated at times, to be indulgent at times—like today—and all the while making sure that enough incidents occurred to keep Carl convinced that he was susceptible to all manner of good or bad luck charms. The lad was a shrewd poker player, but he tended to lose his good sense when he suspected that luck was against him, and to go to pieces when he was sure that fortune had turned its face the other way. A deadly fighter, too—Carl had a first class army record—so long as he had his good luck charm with him. There had been several witnesses to today's scrap; they'd all noted how the lad had faltered suddenly, when he seemed to be winning, and had seen Vincent give his nephew the missing piece from the silver chain young Willard always wore.

THERE WAS ONE more phone call to make. Vincent dialed the number, humming to himself. "Dummy?" he asked when the connection was made.

"Yeah. That you, Mr. Vincent?"

"Right. It's all set for tomorrow night. But there's one thing you have to do before you come here. You've got to get the good-luck charm off him—the silver chain he wears around his neck. I don't care how you do it, but make it look like simple robbery and don't hurt him."

"Hell, Mr. Vincent, why can't the whole job be done then?"

"Too risky. It might lead to you, and I don't want that. We have

a perfect set-up, what with these burglaries that have been going on for the past month. You're in no danger of being connected with them—the law knows that you're not that kind of artist. The whole point is that, against an unarmed intruder—our burglar, who knows better than to carry a gun—Carl should have had a good chance, probably would have beaten him if he hadn't been thrown off by losing his charm. You'll take all his valuables, of course, so it doesn't look as if the charm was your main target. The boy has courage. He'll try to protect his uncle regardless, but he won't have any faith in himself. You know what happens when a fighter is convinced that his luck has gone."

"Sure. Okay, Mr. Vincent, but I'll have to charge a little more, you understand."

"Of course," Abner replied, wincing inwardly. Even though Dummy was not going to be able to collect anything at all, the thought of raising the price was painful. He forced himself to sound generous. Suppose we make it fifteen hundred."

"Okay."

And when the police arrived, Abner thought, they would find both Carl and the intruder dead. It wouldn't be difficult to put across the idea that Dummy had decided to cash in on the series of robberies . . .

CARL WILLARD was sitting at the table, laying out fortune cards when Vincent came into the room, carrying a bulky envelope, a worried expression on his face. He put the envelope on the table and and into the overstuffed chair beside it.

"Carl," he said shakily, in the tone he'd practiced for a week, "you never told me about this . . ."

The blond young man looked up, then swept the cards into a pile. "I never thought you'd believe it, Uncle Ab. You always laughed when I talked about the curse."

"Well, who wouldn't, if he didn't have all the data? After all, my father never mentioned it—your grandfather, Carl—and his early death, at the age of twenty-three, was explainable enough. It's not surprising when a soldier is killed on patrol, whether the day happens to be his birthday or not."

"His twenty-second birthday. And he believed the curse, too—you can see that now—whether he talked about it or not. Why else did he change his name?"

"Well, there's a reason for that, outside of superstition. He was head-over-heels in love with Jessie Vincent, and he was poor. Her father ap-

proved of him, but insisted that he change his name as the price of his consent to the marriage. And Jesse, for all that she loved my father, was a dutiful daughter. She never would have married without her parents' consent."

Vincent took the collection of papers—letters, transcripts from diaries, and newspaper clippings—from the envelope, and lit a cigarette. "It all started when that hexman cursed Barnaby Willard, my great-grandfather." He rifled through the papers and took out a faded sheet typed on an old L. C. Smith machine. "... and he fixed his single eye on me and said, 'For twenty-four years I have endured your insults and insinuations, but no more. Now on you and yours I lay the curse of twenty and four, and then no more. Listen to your doom, Barnaby Willard—yours and those to follow:

*At twenty-one, the deed is done;
If twenty-two, your birth you'll rue;
Reach twenty-three, and hell you'll see;
Seek twenty-four, and then no more."*

"And I laughed and said, 'You'll have to turn back the clock, you old charlatan. I'm fifty-seven years old, and I'll live to be ninety.'"

"But he died at the age of fifty-seven, exactly twenty-four days after that," Carl said. "And his only son, Benjamin—your grandfather, uncle—married at the age of seventeen, and fell off his horse and broke his neck on his twenty-first birthday. He'd never fallen before, been riding since he was twelve."

"Oliver Willard," mused Abner, "married at the age of eighteen. He had two sons, Julius—my father, who changed his name to Vincent—and Stanley, your father. After Oliver's death, Stanley was taken in by a cousin, who wouldn't for a moment consider the boy's changing the family name. But they didn't both die at the age of twenty-three—my father was injured on his twenty-third birthday. It was your father who died in a fire, along with your mother and your sister."

"It was a kind of death," said Carl. "Great-uncle Julius was a hopeless idiot for the rest of his life. And after his twenty-fourth birthday he didn't even know his name..."

"THE TWENTY AND FOUR," mused Vincent. "That number has been connected with each member of our family, male and female, since the curse. Look here—your mother was twenty-two, and your sister was three—but the number of their house had been changed to twenty-four when the numbers on Cranston Street were re-arranged by the town

board, a week before the fire. Your father had tried to stop it—failing that, he was negotiating to sell the house and move.

"One aunt died twenty-four hours after contracting a cold. . . . But here's the thing that touches you, Carl. You are not the eldest son—you had a brother who died before he was a month old. I came across a reference in these papers that apparently referred to you, but somehow didn't look right. So I checked. That's why I waited to talk to you about this now. I just got this letter today."

He took an envelope from his pocket, and removed a newspaper clipping. It read:

WILLARD, Arthur N., on Feb. 13, infant son of Stanley and Jane, age three weeks. Service at Dutch Reformed Church, Kenyon Street, Saturday, 3 P.M.

"The paper says, age three weeks Carl, but that is an error, I think. You've noticed cousin Agatha's reference to the 'poor little one, only twenty-four days,' in this letter where she mentions your mother being sick, and it seems to be about you—but I don't think so. It could be a reference to your brother Arthur. I remember once that cousin Agatha started to say something about 'Arthur' and then changed the subject and talked about you. It all came back to me when I went through these papers a few weeks ago."

There was a slight frown on Carl's face. "But what do you think it means?"

Abner Vincent stabbed out his cigarette. Now was the time he had to put things just so, make just the right type of inference. "The curse has worked out exactly on the eldest sons in the main line of descent. It has been obscure with the others, though with them, the final figure has always played a part. Twenty-four."

"Benjamin Willard died at twenty-one. Oliver Willard died at twenty-two. Stanley Willard—he was the elder of twins, by a matter of minutes—died at twenty-three. Your elder brother died at twenty-four, but twenty-four days instead of years. I am fifty-two. I think this means that you don't have to feel you're necessarily doomed on your twenty-fourth birthday. You just have to be careful, Carl. Don't lose or misplace that charm—maybe it means something after all—and be extra careful tomorrow. It's the twenty-fourth . . . I really wouldn't go out tomorrow night, if I were you..."

By the expression on his nephew's face, he saw that he'd hit the right note. Carl was a battleground of conflicting emotions. He believed and yet fought against belief. He had to show that he wasn't afraid, had to

take chances—but the subconscious fears tripped him up. That silver chain with the good luck charm bolstered him. Once that was completely gone . . .

But as things stood now, nothing short of physical restraint could keep Carl Willard home tomorrow night; he had to show that he wasn't afraid.

IT WAS AN odd twist of fortune, Vincent thought. Oliver Willard had married money, and Julius had lost it. That could just as easily have accounted for his breakdown following an accident as this nonsensical curse. Stanley Willard had made a fortune before he and his family—except for Carl, who had been staying with relatives for the weekend—were wiped out in a fire.

The trend to superstition must have come from Carl's mother, he thought. Her father may have cursed her when she ran away with Stanley Willard, who showed no signs of being a money-maker in his teens. She must have said something about a curse on the family in the child's presence, and her generally superstitious ways reinforced it.

He remembered when the lad had first mentioned the alleged curse, shortly after the homeless boy had come to live with his only-surviving relative, who had been made his guardian and trustee of his estate. Why had Stanley's will specified that Carl would inherit not on his twenty-first but the day after his twenty-fourth birthday?

All he'd had to go on was that silly little jingle, which Carl had picked up somewhere in his childhood. He thought of the envelope he'd brought down last night and chuckled. He'd learned that the curse really had been documented some time ago, but he'd been careful not to let the boy find that envelope until the habit of belief, despite his rebellions against it, was thoroughly instilled. Since Carl had no source of information about his family outside his uncle, the preparation could be made gradually.

Yes, you had to have luck, and he'd made his own. Abner Vincent thought. One slip, one slip only, made it imperative that Carl die before his twenty-fourth birthday, well before Vincent would have to make an accounting. But now, there would be no more slips. Dummy would be coming soon; Carl had returned from town a couple of hours ago, not waking his uncle who had apparently retired.

He waited, listening. Dummy would drive up the back road and park the car a good distance from the house, entering through the window that had been left half-open for him. He'd checked to be sure, but there was no need. The boy was obviously upset enough so that he hadn't

looked around to be sure everything was locked up. Which meant that Dummy had done the first part of his job. Carl would be too shamefaced to awaken his uncle when he came in, and admit that he'd been reckless.

There—there it was, the faint sound of a car coming up the back road. Vincent went to the window and watched, saw a figure momentarily outlined in the moonlight; it ducked into the cover of trees, obviously approaching the house.

Should he go downstairs now, or wait a little longer? He decided on the former. He'd wait in the study, so that he could tell when the window was raised. His story would be that he'd fallen asleep in the big chair, and Carl must have put the lights out when he left, knowing that his uncle hated to have lights burning, but didn't want to be awakened. That had happened often enough before, when Carl had friends in.

Softly, he made his way downstairs, into the study and stood beside the partly-opened door, from which point he could see the partly-opened window. Dummy was doing a good job, he thought; too bad he'd have to be killed, too, but Vincent wasn't taking any chances. Carl's gun was in the drawer. Should he take it, just in case? He decided against it. The original plan was best.

He would attack Dummy, calling for help. They'd struggle, and Carl would come to his uncle's rescue. Vincent would feign unconsciousness and Carl and Dummy would tangle. And if the boy seemed to be getting the better of it, Vincent would intervene, to make sure that his nephew received mortal injuries. Dummy knew how to inflict them.

His glance fell on the glowing dial of the small clock on the table—three-eleven. He pushed the study door open soundlessly and stepped out onto the thick carpet that covered the floor of the living room. Yes—there was a figure over by the window. Abner Vincent shouted out for help as he leaped toward the intruder. The figure turned swiftly . . .

And Vincent faltered, tried desperately to stop. This wasn't Dummy! He could see only burning eyes and know that he was wide open to murderous attack as the unknown came toward him. The instant of terror was cut short as he felt himself falling back from the shock of the heavy blow . . .

THERE WERE voices around him. He opened his eyes to find the living room lights burning. He was on the couch, but he couldn't move. Carl was bending over him.

Somehow he found his voice, though it sounded very faint to him. "Carl—did you . . . ? How . . . ?"

Numbly he heard his nephew explain how he had come downstairs to find Vincent on the floor and a figure trying to escape. "I got him, Uncle Ab. I wasn't afraid, thanks to you."

"To—to me?"

"What you told me last night, uncle. Suddenly it all made sense and I saw what a fool I was to be afraid all the time. You know—I took off that silly charm I've been wearing. I realized I didn't need it."

"You . . . you . . ." Then Dummy hadn't gotten the chain.

"This was the second fight I had tonight, Uncle. Someone tried to rob me in town. I fixed him, but good."

Then Dummy would talk, Vincent was thinking. Dummy had been expecting an easy victim. He'd be mad enough to talk now . . . Vincent found that he could move his head. Beyond Carl, he saw the doctor and a policeman. The doctor was shaking his head and Vincent felt he knew what that was about; he could feel that he was broken inside somehow, that it wouldn't be long . . . You had to have luck, and his luck was running out . . .

"That curse," Carl was saying. "That curse has fallen on someone in every generation. Great-grandfather died at twenty-one, grandfather at twenty-two, my father at twenty-three. It missed my brother, so it has to be me . . . But, you see, the one it dooms, it protects, too. I'm not going to worry any more, Uncle, not for another eight months, at least. Because I realized last night that nothing really had could happen to me before my twenty-fourth birthday, since my little brother couldn't be the one . . ."

Abner Vincent felt a chill running through his bones. God—could it be possible? But how? He was going to die, he knew that, but it wasn't the curse. There was nothing that fitted in his case.

The light was beginning to fade around him. He heard the ticking of the tall grandfather's clock and turned his head slightly with an effort.

It was the last thing he saw—the hands resting at twenty minutes after four.

The clock face blurred and faded . . . and then no more . . .

The Endocrine Monster

by R. Anthony

IT WAS MY USUAL midweekly visit to Dr. Wilkie's laboratory. For some reason a large and heavily barred animal cage had attracted my attention. Its sole inhabitant was a small guinea-pig.

"What's the idea of this big cage for a dinky guinea-pig?" I demanded promptly. "Going to make a lion out of him?"

Dr. Wilkie grinned. "Perhaps," he said. "As a matter of fact, the ordinary cages are not strong enough to hold Andy. That's what I call this chap. Just watch!"

All the victims were handsome young men, and all of them crushed to death . . .

He took an empty basket cage, the square kind with half-inch meshes of chicken-wire and open at the top, and dropped it into the barred cage, covering the guinea-pig. "Now watch Andy!"

Anyone who has ever watched guinea-pigs in a laboratory will have noticed the patience of these animals, which makes them such ideal subjects for experiments. They are passive and never show signs of fight. This Andy chap, however, was different, decidedly so. As soon as the basket cage fell over him, he reared up and began to claw the chicken-wire. To my amazement the wires bent and snapped like so many feeble threads. In scarcely ten seconds a rent was made, sufficiently large to permit Andy to pass through.

But Andy was not content with the opening. He turned to another spot and ripped and tore, then to still another point to repeat the performance. He tore and twisted with a quiet ferocity that was completely startling in a guinea-pig. In a short minute the basket cage was reduced to a mass of accordedonised shreds.

After that he ran to the bars and began to nuzzle them.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, drawing back a bit. "He's—doctor, is he bending those bars? Or is my imagination making me think they are bending?"

Dr. Wilkie waved a competent hand and remarked, "I guess they'll hold Andy all right. But let's go into the library and smoke while I tell You a story."

This is the story Dr. Wilkie told me that night.

2

ALL THIS HAPPENED long ago, back in 1915, to be exact. We were a party of seven going up the Parana on an old stern-wheeler, the property of Don Ramon, one of the seven. We were on our way to the Gran Chaco to get—But why bother about that part? We never got there, and that's the story.

It wasn't a lucky trip. Engine trouble, snags, leaks, and what-not, and finally a terrific *pampero* that drove us up on an island in mid-stream, and partly wrecked our stern wheel. It also wrecked our only boat and marooned us on the ship, since to get to the shore we would have to wade through shallows populated with greedy *jacares* and alligators.

Fortunately some huge floats came down the Parana within a few hours and the rafters stopped to help us make repairs. And it was then that we

first heard of the "Strong One" or the "Strong Demon", as it was called. We told the rafters that we were making for the Gran Chaco and that we intended to leave the ship near Villeta and pole up the Brazo Occidental into the Chaco.

"*Santo Cristo!*" exclaimed one of the rafters. "Stay away from there, *Senores!* There is something fearful there!"

"Something fearful?" Don Ramon inquired. "What do you mean?"

"We know not, *Senor,*" the rafter replied. "But there must be some—some demon there. There, at the mouth of the Brazo Occidental is the *Peninsula del Circulo* where ships and rafts stop for the night. They prefer that to the harbor of San Lorenzo a mile farther down. But now they are afraid!"

"Well, tell us, then," Lassignac demanded in his peremptory way.

"The people told us. They warned us. We must stay in camp and not leave it. But Juan Felista, one of our company, heeded not. He went out into the night—to meet some woman it was—and returned not. In the morning we searched. We found him"—here he shivered and crossed himself—" *Senores*, his back was broken—like that!—and his chest crushed in! And he was a very powerful man!"

Arnheimer and Connaughton, the leaders of our party looked at each other. Arnheimer was a German who had "gone native." Connaughton was an American of certain brilliancy and uncertain passions. His particular crony was Darrell, with whom he had hunted the world and had been hunted in turn.

"Bah!" Darrell exclaimed. "A jaguar, I'll bet!"

"No, no, *Senor,*" the rafter protested. "It could not be a jaguar. A jaguar tears with his claws. And he rips the throat with his teeth! This—this demon—he *crushed!* Juan Felista was crushed—as you take a reed and crush it in your hands."

Arnheimer was listening carefully. The rest of us were listening, too. But somehow I felt that Arnheimer was at home among these people and would know if they were lying, or simply imagining things. "It sounds strange," he said after a minute's thought. "A snake?—But we have no large snakes any longer. Not in these parts. Farther north, perhaps, in the deep jungles. But hardly here. What think you, *Senores?*" he asked the rest of us.

Mostly we shrugged our shoulders and looked wise. Janis, however, made a slight gesture to call attention and asked, "Did you see any tracks?"

The rafter nodded. "Yes, *Senor*, there was a streak through the grass, and some giant footprints beside it. It surely must be a demon! The blessed mother protect us!"

"Oho!" Connaughton burst forth. "Then there were tracks! I thought demons never left tracks!"

"Tracks or not," Lassignac bristled, "we shall see! We'll look for the thing! Unless the *Senores* feel that their well-being can not be risked!" he added with an insufferable air of patronage.

Darrell surveyed him with a cold stare. "You damned little porcupine! I'll sit up your well-being in a moment!"

Lassignac made a gesture which was an insult in itself. "You *Americanos*! Bah! You always know so much! And then you don't!"

Darrell let out a blood-curdling screech and yelled. "One more slant like that and over you'll go! Right to those damned *jacares*! Just look at the pretty things clap their jaws!" And then he laughed.

Janis interfered. "Whoever is sent to the alligators, the sender follows him! I'll see to that!" His voice was chilly and they all knew that he meant what he said. Tall and thin, with a look of innate refinement, he seemed out of place in that bunch. Still, it was the sort of thing he liked. He had trained for medicine, but hated to practice, and hopped around the world in search of adventure.

Janis' words stopped the quarrel and we turned to the rafters. "But what of San Lorenzo?" asked Don Ramon. "Do they know of the demon there?"

"Oh, yes, they know!"

"And have they seen it?"

"No, *Senores*! Nobody has seen the demon. They are afraid to! They would see—and then die!"

Arnheimer stroked his beard and evolved another question: "But what becomes of the tracks? Or didn't you follow them?"

The rafter shivered at the memory and grew pale. "*Senores*," he said hoarsely, "they stopped at the body of Juan Felista, and then—then disappeared!"

"Well, I like that!" said Connaughton with a chuckle that sounded rather ghoulish under the circumstances. "But didn't you follow to the place where they started?"

The rafters hemmed and hawed a bit and finally admitted that they had been afraid to follow the trail into the forest. And that was all we got out of them. It was a bit unsatisfactory, but just enough to whet our

appetite for more. We resolved most certainly to pay the Peninsula del Circulo a visit, and speculated on what we might find.

A few days later we docked at the village of San Lorenzo, below the mouth of the Brazo Occidental. We had to stop there to arrange for the ship and to buy flatboats to ascend the Brazo.

There is not much to say about the village, except that the people looked as though they all had malaria. They were listless, thin to emaciation, with a muddy, unhealthy color. The swamps of course!

During our evening meal in the single cafe, I noticed Connaughton getting very restless. He was always restless, but now he was worse than ever, pecking away at his food, drinking a lot, and eyeing the *senoritas* on the square. Before the rest of us finished with our meal, he arose, stretched, gave us a smile, and murmured, "I'm off! See you later!"

Darrell called after him, "Careful, Ned! That demon, you know!"

We were surprised by Connaughton's departure. All except Darrell who shrugged and said in explanation: "It's always that way with him. Every few weeks. If it wasn't for the women, Connie would be one of the biggest men in the States in whatever line he cared. University man and all that. Had plenty of money to start with, but—" He stopped himself as if he had said more than he intended. "Women! Huh!" he muttered.

"But, *Senor* Darrell!" Don Ramon complained. "This *Senor* Connaughton—will he be back tomorrow to go up the Brazo with us?"

Darrell shook his head. "Don't know. He'll come back when he pleases. Perhaps tonight, perhaps not for a couple of weeks. Oh, don't worry about him! He'll catch up with us. Ned's always there when the divvy comes."

There was little to do that night except to loaf and talk and finally go to bed. Next day, too, we lolled around; except Arnheimer and Don Ramon, who were arranging for flatboats and men to take us up the Brazo. Late in the afternoon Don Ramon told us he had got the boats. But we would have to do the poling ourselves, unless we cared to wait over for several days, since the morrow was some sort of church holiday. On feast days these people would not work.

"Well, a little perspiration will do us some good," Janis said reflectively. "Sweat some of this rotten alcohol out of our system and harden us for what is coming in the Gran Chaco."

Toward sunset the place began to fill up. The feast days and Sundays brought many people to the village, we were told, and, as in many other Catholic countries, celebration began the eve before the feast. The people were dressed in their best and were rather interesting. Lots of them were

Spanish, Portuguese and Italian in origin, but most of them rather mixed in blood, I thought.

After our evening meal we were again seated around a table in the *patio*, all except Connaughton, who had not yet returned. But there were more people now, chatting, drinking, singing, and playing. Altogether it was getting lively. Occasionally there would be dances, solo or in pairs.

Somewhere near 9 o'clock I noticed a young woman slip into the court through a small side entrance. Her movements were sinuous, reminding one of a cat, but remarkably graceful. A light *mantilla* was thrown over her features. But she was young, that was evident from her movements.

She sat down a few tables from us. With a flit of her wrist she flung back the lace *mantilla*, and then we saw her face. When I tell you that I have never forgotten that face, you can imagine that it must have impressed me. To this day I see it vividly before me just as I saw it that night. Yet when I try to describe it, it evades me.

It was beautiful, there was no doubt about that, beautiful with that warmth and class of the high-bred Spanish type. To this was added something of the somber sadness of the Indian. Yet it seemed to me that her figure, while slender and beautifully rounded, seemed somehow to have larger and more angular proportions than the delicate ones one expects to find in a girl. Her hips, for instance, were larger than necessary. Some of our athletic girls these days look that way, at times.

As she ordered her wine, her voice sounded melodious, but throaty, with a curious huskiness. I'll admit she interested me and I could hardly keep my eyes off her. The rest felt the same way, so they told me later. In fact, almost everyone in the *patio* seemed to feel like that.

She drank silently, her brilliant eyes darting hither and thither. Then the music struck up, and with a sudden jerk she arose and swept into a dance in the center of the court. It was one of those rapid Castilian melodies, which later changed into a slower movement.

This girl danced with marvelous grace, doing the intricate steps with the assurance of long practice. She seemed to vibrate life. Then as the music took up the slower air, she changed. She twisted and turned, and swayed and shook. Her gestures seemed to beckon, her body seemed on fire with life.

From somewhere I caught the remark, "It is the fair Bonita."

Of course that meant nothing to me. What got me was her dancing. I had seen some pretty passionate stuff in those hot-blooded countries. But this was more than passion; it was invitation.

Bonita stopped with a final whirl. At once there was a torrent of applause, in which we joined, calls for more, and offers of drink. Someone reached over to seize her arm. And again I was startled. With a quick move she thrust the hand aside. But the force of the blow was sufficient to push the man clear to the wall.

Around us the people spoke. "Bonita is very strong."

Surely strange, I thought. Beyond a momentary flash in her eyes Bonita gave no further sign of displeasure; she smiled and nodded to the people. Then she caught sight of us—evident strangers in that village. Her eyes widened, then grew small with sudden resolution.

She came toward us with a feline swagger, the *mantilla* draped over her shoulder, hands on her swaying hips, eyes flashing, and lips curled in a fascinating smile. She moved slowly, each step an alluring swag, till she reached our table and stopped before Don Ramon.

There she fastened her eyes on him, and he seemed to be held as if hypnotized. They stared at each other, Bonita with her head tilted invitingly, Don Ramon apparently irresolute. Not a word was spoken between them. But Don Ramon began to flush a slow red; he got up, muttered an excuse to us, and left with the girl.

"So Don Ramon likes women, too," Darrell remarked cynically.

"This woman, this Bonita," said Arnheimer, "where does she come from?"

We inquired, and someone said, "She lives in a cottage on a small farm at the edge of the forest, a little way above the Peninsula del Circulo, opposite the rapids of the Brazo Occidental."

"Where the demon is?" Darrell asked.

The man looked startled. "By the wounds of Christ, *Senor*, do not mention that! We are all of us afraid of it, of that thing, whatever it may be. All except Bonita. She has never been harmed."

"And she is not afraid?" Lassignac queried.

"Not the slightest. She laughs at our fears. But, *Senor*, we have seen them, the dead ones, right in that jungle near the Peninsula, at the edge of the swamps. All killed the same way! All crushed, with their ribs broken and their backs broken! Holy Mary, it was terrible!"

"But were any of them eaten?" Janis put in.

The man looked a bit surprised at this question. He pondered for a while before he answered. "No," he finally said. "The bodies were crushed and left there."

"A strange demon," Janis mused. "All animals kill either for food or in

self-defense. Here apparently it is not a desire for food. Still, it is hardly conceivable that any human would attack a being so powerful that it can crush in defense."

Arnheimer nodded in agreement. "May I ask how long this have been happening? And how many have been killed?"

The man eyed the two with fearful interest. "Careful, *Senores!* I hope you do not intend to attack that—that—whatever it is?"

Janis smiled. "No, hardly that. But answer our questions."

"A little more than a year ago, I think, was the first time that someone was killed."

"From this village?"

"No. And that is strange, *Senor*. It is always people who are visitors here like yourselves."

Darrell laughed shortly. "Doesn't sound good for us, does it?"

Janis waved him to silence and asked, "How many were killed?"

"We are not sure, *Senores*. Two, sometimes three a month; and many we probably never found. Bonita told us of cries and shrieks and groans not far from her house. But when we went we did not always find anything."

"Humph! Did Bonita ever see this—this—demon, as you call it?"

"No, *Senores*."

Someone just then called our informant and that was all we could learn, since others seemed to know even less.

"Well, that settles that," said Darrell. "I move we look up that thing. It's got me going."

"Very well," announced Lassignac. "I, too, will go. Or I will lead!" he said with insufferable grandiloquence. "And where a Lassignac leads others may well follow!"

"Cut out the trumpets and bass drums, you fish!" Darrell snapped. "We'll all go together and—"

Arnheimer stopped him with a gesture. "No, we can not go," he said. "Tomorrow early we must start. Don Ramon should be—should be rid of the girl by then. And perhaps Connaughton will be back, too. We can not bother with these side issues in a view of the purpose of this trip."

That settled the matter for the time.

But Don Ramon did not come back. After breakfast next morning we looked in his room and found his bed untouched. Nine o'clock came and the bells in the decrepit old church began to ring for mass, and our

partner was still absent. So we decided to look for him, whether he liked that or not.

Since we knew he had gone with Bonita, we inquired the way to her home. We could take the road, we were told, such as it was, which led past the cottage. Or there was a shorter way, if we followed a faint path along the edge of the swamps. The latter would be nearer, but was not much used on account of the mosquitoes, and the danger—from the demon.

Despite the caution, we decided to take the path, figuring that Don Ramon would hardly return quite openly along the road, but would take the concealed way.

We found the path boggy and dark, and thick with mosquitoes. Fortunately, we had head-nets with us, so we were protected at the most vital points. The jungle got thicker as we went on, hedging in on the path, until we seemed to move between two solid walls of vegetation. Later we skirted a swamp and the trees grew thinner, although the ground vegetation was a greater tangle than ever. Finally we seemed to be leaving the river, since the ground became firmer and the trees more scattered, much like some of the open "parks" in Texas.

And then we saw white water ahead. "Hello!" exclaimed Darrell, who was in advance. "That must be the Brazo! But how the deuce—"

"Yes," said Arnheimer. "Apparently we have got onto the Peninsula del Circulo!"

"The lair of the demon!" Darrell laughed. "Ha! We weren't going to look him up! But we're here after all!"

"We may find him," Lassignac cried excitedly, "and then—"

Janis smiled amiably. "And then we go right on. We're here to look for Don Ramon, remember! Let's strike back along the Peninsula and see if we can't find our path again. We must have lost it somewhere, I'm sure."

So we turned away from the rapids toward the neck of the Peninsula. As we went along we saw signs of clearing, of human activity. Camping spots, of course, where the boatmen and rafters had laid over.

Darrell, once more in the lead, suddenly stopped and pointed to something in the grass. "Connaughton's cap!" he exclaimed.

We crowded around him. There lay the cap, beside the path as if carelessly dropped. We all recognized it at once.

"He's around here somewhere," said Darrell. "Oh, Ned! Oh, Connie!" he called.

We joined him in the call, but except for the noise of birds and in-

sects, and the chatter of some little monkeys, we heard nothing like an answer.

"I'll bet he's around here somewhere," Darrell insisted, in a curiously flat tone. "Let's look for him!"

Although he didn't say it, we knew what was on his mind. We saw his face suddenly grown pale and strained. And I feel sure that the rest of us looked no better.

"Have the demons got Connaughton?" was what he had left unsaid.

We had brought our revolvers and automatics with us. Silently we drew them and then we spread out to search.

The point where we found Connaughton's cap was at the neck of the Peninsula. So we were moving toward the main river bank. The ground vegetation there was a bad tangle and difficult to get through, but in places it would leave fair-sized spaces covered with lush grasses, looking like comfortable spots for camping. I had reached one of these grass plots, when I noticed that it looked somewhat different from the others I had examined as if some one had sat there and kicked holes in the sod. Not recently, that is, but a day or two before. You know, in such moist places tracks do not keep long.

Well, I did my best to follow them. The tracks led through the bushes, over other grass plots. It was chiefly by the broken branches and torn leaves that I was able to follow at all. Finally I came to a thick group of trees on a small hillock. I dared not approach directly, so I moved sideways around the elevation, trying to pierce the gloom of the thicker, looking carefully up and down, prepared for every attack.

Halfway around I caught the glimpse of something gray. I stopped and watched sharply. No movement. I bent down to look along the ground. And there, in the semi-darkness, I could discern something like a body in gray linens. The humming of flies and the odor of decaying flesh apprized me that something else might be close by.

I called to the others. Meantime I looked for some sign of a wild beast, but saw and heard nothing. Seeing the others approach, I pushed forward through the bushes.

There, twisted strangely, eyes protruding and glassy, blood oozing from the distorted mouth, lay Don Ramon! He was quite dead, that was evident. And a little farther, partly hidden behind the bole of a tree, lay another body, clad in white ducks.

Even before I saw the face, I knew it would be the body of Connaughton. Flesh-flies were swarming around it in masses. He must have been

dead fully twenty-four hours. In those latitudes flesh decays rapidly, you know.

"My God, it's Don Ramon!" exclaimed Darrell, the first to come up. His glance flew to where I stood. "And over there?" He came over and saw the body. "Ned!" he groaned.

He turned ghastly pale, and for a moment I thought he was going to faint. But he sank to the ground and there he sobbed, the hard, broken, tearing sobs of a man. It was agonizing to hear him.

Beside Don Ramon's body stood Lassignac, pain unutterable on his frozen features. Till then I had been inclined to despise the chap as a heartless braggadocio; now his sorrow drew me to him. Arnheimer and Janis had come up also and stood there silently, but with a look of iron resolve on their bleak faces.

They were all a strange, even piratical crew; but it seems a human law that man must love something or other. So Darrell had loved Connaughton, and Lassignac had loved Don Ramon, and had gone with them into crimes and unholy adventures.

It was Janis who finally roused Darrell. "Come, Jim! We have work to do!"

Darrell shook himself and got up. "Yes, we've got to find—that—thing!"

Janis was examining the bodies with professional sureness. "Ribs crushed, back broken in both," he said. "As if someone had embraced them!"

"But what?" barked Lassignac. "Surely no human! Don Ramon was strong as a gorilla. I've never seen him beaten."

Janis shook his head wonderingly. "I don't understand this. As we said the other day, there is no animal that simply embraces and crushes." His glance took in Arnheimer, who was moving away slowly, looking at the ground. "The tracks, of course! Let's look for them!"

"Damn it, yes!" Darrell cried and swung in beside Arnheimer.

It was clear that the latter had found something, for he was moving forward, away from the hillock. Since they were careful not to step on the tracks, I could see them myself. What I saw was a streak leading from Don Ramon's body, and beside it some oblong footprints of huge size, but spaced the length of an average person's step. In the dank, lush grass they were quite clear.

They led through the undergrowth, between trees, until we reached an open space, where they mingled with a lot of miscellaneous tracks. There the grass had been pounded down, as at a picnic. And with this we saw other evidence.

"That's blood!" Darrell exclaimed. "That's blood, or I'm a fool! Here's where the thing got Connie and Don Ramon, and then dragged them to that hillock!"

We adopted the suggestion, some of us going one way, the rest in the other direction. At a point opposite our starting place we met. Nothing! We were puzzled, and somewhat frightened. What was this thing that could leave huge footprints and still vanish in thin air? I did a little perspiring right then and there and shed not a few ripples of goose-flesh, let me tell you.

It was Janis again who found the solution. "Humph!" he said. "If this were Africa I'd say it was a gorilla or some such apelike creature. But this is South America, and as far as I know there are no large apes here. That eliminates that. Of course, there is a possibility of a huge ape, but it is not probable. Let's take the probabilities first, before we bother with the improbabilities. Darrell, you and Lassignac circled the other way. Did you see any other tracks besides those giant footprints we were looking for?"

"I? No!—Oh, wait a minute!" Darrell looked perplexed for a moment, then turned quickly and retraced his steps. "Over here!" he called back. "Over here!"

We ran after him. There were tracks there, not at all like those we were seeking, but as if some human had run lightly through the grass. The grass was nearly upright, but the marks were still discernible.

"That's what I mean," said Janis. "Let's take the normal probabilities. Whoever ran here is certainly human, and may know something of what happened here. Further, since these tracks look fairly recent—certainly not older than the thing's footprints—then this human *must have seen*, and must be made to tell! And note that the tracks go only one way—away from the spot, and also away from the hillock with—the hodies! That human must have made tracks in coming here. And since none are visible they must be so old that they are wiped out, just as those of Don Ramon, who certainly came to this point last night, are wiped out. Hence this person must have been with Don Ramon at the time. Suspicious? Indeed, yes!"

There was no need to urge us onward. In a few minutes the new tracks led us to the outskirts of a small farm, where they vanished near a hut at the edge of the forest. The hut was hardly more than a hovel, just four walls of mud mixed with straw, and a small lean-to.

No sound came from the hut. With youthful impulse I moved forward, ahead of the others, and sneaked up to a small window. From within

came the regular breathing of some sleeper. I peered into the gloom. On a bed of straw, covered with a light blanket, lay some person—a woman, I thought.

I reported back at once. It was decided to wake her and question her. "Better be careful," said Lassignac. "There may be more than one there."

His voice had a peculiarly penetrating quality and he spoke louder than he had intended. For at once there was some stirring in the hut, and a few seconds later the door opened and there stood—Bonita!

"I'll be damned!" said Darrell in disgust. For some reason we had forgotten about her, although we knew that she had gone with Don Ramon the night before. But we were looking for something monstrous and hideous and grotesque, for in our minds only that sort of thing could be associated with the fiendish killing of our friends and others. Yet here was the brilliant dancing girl of yesterday, and the tracks led straight to her door.

"Let me question her," said Janis. Without waiting for a consenting reply, he addressed her. "*Senorita*, where is Don Ramon?"

With her streaming hair, and dressed in a sacklike garment, she looked the Indian part of her rather than the Spanish. She didn't appear to be the least bit embarrassed or afraid; in fact, she faced us with a certain reckless confidence, such as one sees in boxers when they are sure of having an easy time with an opponent.

Janis repeated the question.

She smiled and shook her head. "*Senores*, I know not where he is," she said.

"But you must know," Janis insisted sortly. "Why did you run away from him during the night? Out there in the forest?"

This time she did not smile, but looked at Janis with sharp eyes. "I ran away," she said slowly, "I ran away because—because that—that thing came. I heard it—and then ran."

Janis eyed her contemplatively. "This—this thing, as you call it—has it ever attacked you?"

"Oh no, *senor*. It kills only—men!" And here she laughed rather gleefully. It gave me the shivers.

"If that is true, if it attacks only men, then why did you run away from Don Ramon and leave him?"

This time Janis had scored. Now I saw the purpose of his questions. Bonita saw it, too. But she snapped her fingers. "Ob, la la! I just heard—and ran!"

"You—you ran—you, who are very strong? When your strength

added to Don Ramon's might have saved him?" Janis continued with emphasis. His eyes gleamed with sudden light. "Yes, and Connaughton, too!" he added sternly.

Bonita became enraged at Janis' insistence. "What care I for these men?" she flared. "I could kill them myself! I could kill you!" She stamped the ground in anger. "And I will! I will!" she screamed.

Darrell came running from behind the hut. We had not seen him disappear, he had moved so quietly. But now he came in a rush, waving something at us.

"I've got them! She's the murderer!" he called, pointing at Bonita. "You—you she-devil!" he bellowed at her. "Though you're only a woman, blast you, you're going to die! And die right now!" He flung the things he carried into Bonita's face.

As they fell to the ground we saw what they were. Just large, oblong strips of leather fastened to a pair of ordinary woman's shoes—that's all. But at once we understood how the tracks in the forest could be made with them. Most certainly these—well, this footgear had made those extraordinary footprints.

"You—you demon! You monster!" Darrell continued furiously. "You killed Don Ramon and dragged him away! I don't know how you did it! But I know that you are going to die for it! Get ready, you!"

Darrell swung up his automatic.

"Good God!" I muttered. I couldn't understand at all. Was Darrell really going to shoot this woman? What had she done? Left Connaughton and Don Ramon to be killed, so I thought. Certainly he couldn't mean that he believed she did the killing herself!

I moved toward Darrell to stop him and tried to call him. But I never said what I wanted to say.

It happened like a flash. Bonita whirled to one side and Darrell's gun roared. He missed her. With a tigerish spring she was on him.

And then I saw what I never would have believed had I not seen it myself. With a quick blow she knocked the automatic from Darrell's hand. Then she flung her arms around him. Darrell fought furiously, screaming curses. But that was only for a moment. And then I saw his face turn crimson, his eyes seemed to pop from his head, we heard a dull crash, a smothered gurggle, blood rushed from Darrell's mouth, and he was flung aside, broken, dead.

This woman, still not much more than a girl, had *crushed a grown man to death!* I think none of us moved. The speed, the ghastly hor-

ror of it had us paralyzed.

But Bonita swung around with fury in her eyes. I was close, for I had jumped to intercept Darrell's shooting. And she seized me. I wanted to tear away, but I was helpless, my own boasted strength like that of a babe against hers. She grabbed me by the arm, pulled me toward herself and embraced me.

I felt an agony of shock tingling to my forehead and fingertips, a surging protest, a revolting horror at the inhuman thing that was happening to me. Then everything went black and I knew nothing more.

Apparently I was out only a few minutes. As I awoke I felt numb and helpless. With some difficulty I rolled over and tried to rise. It was painful. Something in my side ached furiously, stabbing me as I moved—a broken rib, as we found later.

Janis and Arnheimer were standing near me, while farther away Lassignac was busy winding ropes around an inert body. That body was Bonita, unconscious or dead.

"What—what has happened?" I wheezed.

Janis turned around. "Oh, you are alive? Thank God! I feared she had gotten you, after all!"

"Feel half alive," I said. "All right otherwise. Only weak in the back and ribs. But what's happened to Bonita?"

"Janis threw her," Arnheimer answered. "Struck her in the neck or back of the head."

"No," Janis corrected. "I thumbed her on the vagus nerve. A little Japanese trick I learned over in Kioto. You may have heard of it. I wasn't sure I could shoot quick enough or straight enough to prevent her from crushing you, so I thumbed her and made her faint. Lassignac is tying her up with all the ropes he can find. Hope they'll hold her. If they don't"—he paused reflectively—"well, we may have to shoot her yet!"

Lassignac was still winding ropes around Bonita until she began to look like a bandaged Egyptian mummy. Even at that, I had my doubts about the ropes. They were old and rotten, weathered from lying around outside; but perhaps if the quality of the rope was not enough, then the quantity might do.

That's what Lassignac seemed to think. He was winding away with fervor, muttering and cursing under his breath. I got up slowly and went over to gaze at Bonita. Just then she woke up. Recollection came swiftly to her. "What are you doing?" she demanded of Lassignac.

I could see that the latter was furious with her and with himself. The former because his friend Don Ramon was dead, the last because he

was doing something that went against the grain, against the innate chivalry of his nation, and he bated himself for it. Under such circumstances a man is likely to go farther than he intends. So Lassignac.

"I am binding you," he snarled. "I will see you hanged, you female brute! You fiend, you arch-murderess!" he screamed. "Bah! *Cochon!*" And then he kicked her.

It was a beastly rotten thing to do. But as I said, under a strain a man may do things he would normally think impossible.

Bonita seemed to shiver for a moment. Then—it happened so quickly that I couldn't quite follow—she just seemed to bound from the ground, the ropes falling from her like so many broken threads. In the same upward motion she seized Lassignac and before we could prevent she hurled him with terrific force against a tree, where he crashed and lay inert.

She turned to the rest of us. Our guns had come up at once, I can tell you. No, we didn't shoot. At that I am not so sure that our bullets could have stopped her unless they tore her to pieces. That uncanny concentrated energy and demonic strength needed more than bullets to stop.

But our bullets were not necessary. She had thrown Lassignac with such force that the impact had shaken the tree. And there was something up there that was disturbed, and didn't like to be disturbed. As Bonita pivoted toward us, something like a rope, yellow and shiny, slithered down from above to her shoulder, hung there for a fraction of a second, and dropped to the ground. From there it moved through the grass toward the jungle, not smoothly, but in a series of leaps and bounds much as a coiled bed-spring bounces when you throw it, and finally disappeared in the thickets.

None of us had seen it clearly, but we all knew what it was from the way it moved. It was that deadliest of South American snakes, the *fer de lance*, swiftest and most venomous of reptiles.

"I'm glad it didn't come this way," Arnheimer murmured, pale to his eyes.

Bonita had scarcely moved since the snake struck her. Already her eyes were filled with horror and fear. And scarcely half a minute later she began to writhe in the first paroxysm of pain. No, we could do nothing for her. She had been struck in the neck, close to the jugular vein, a direct path to the heart. She twisted and screamed in her agony. It was gruesome, and I almost felt sorry for her.

It didn't last long. Just a few minutes. I shudder at the recollection. The

discovery of the bodies of Connaughton and Don Ramon was terrible to us, and terrible, too, was the sight of Darrell's death. But most terrible is the memory of the woman, Bonita, rippling and heaving under the action of the poison.

"Well, it's over, thank God!" said Janis finally. He had tried to ease her last moments, but there was little he could do. "But merciful God! What havoc! Bonita dead! Three of our hunch—no!"—he looked over where Lassignac lay limp against the bole—"no four! And she'd have gotten us, too, perhaps, if it hadn't been for the *fer de lance*! Well, it's over!"

"Yes," said Arnheimer, his voice soft and uncertain. "It's over. Our whole expedition is over. Don Ramon and Connaughton held the key to the plans. And they are dead!"

"Well, then it's ended," said Janis. "Except to bury our friends and this—this—afflicted woman!"

3

"Well?" I questioned as Dr. Wolkie finished. "What's the answer? What does it—?" "Wait a moment," he interrupted. "Before you ask questions, let me show you a passage from a recent book."

He went over to one of the shelves, withdrew a book, and marked one of the pages. "This book deals with the endocrines or internal secretions, of which you doubtless know. Before showing you this passage let me explain just one point. The adrenal or suprarenal gland lies just above the kidney, and anatomically has two parts, an outer cortex or shell, and an inner medulla or pulp. The medulla gives off adrenalin, which regulates blood pressure in all parts of the body through action on the blood vessels. The cortex gives off an unknown secretion which seems to have a remarkable influence. When it is diseased, certain curious things happen. Now read what I have indicated.

"The main course of cortical disease proceeds as follows:

"a. In early cases there is precocious sexuality, adiposity in the pelvic region, remarkable muscular strength, recalling the infants hercules of the French writers. In girls, there is a marked tendency toward maleness. Later on the fatty tissue is lost, the children grow thin and die of exhaustion.

"b. In young women the disease develops with phenomenal muscular strength and endurance, assertiveness and even pugnacity of behavior,

and excessive sexuality; this stage is followed by the appearance of male characters, such as beardedness, general hairiness, and hair on the chest and abdomen. Here we are reminded of the 'strong women' and 'bearded ladies' of the circuses and side-shows. Later the muscular strength is replaced by excessive weakness, and finally death from exhaustion ensues."

Thus far I read. "Jove!" I exclaimed. Then this woman—this Bonita—
—WAS—?"

"Precisely, said Dr. Wilkie. "She was suffering from cortical disease. The symptoms are clear. She was really helpless, driven inexorably by a malady over which she had no control. Like the Nuremberg maiden, she crushed those that she embraced."

"Humph!" I mused. "And so your guinea-pig—?"

"Is really a female. I have experimented, causing an excessive or altered secretion of the endocrine glands by the use of a certain injection. The symptoms are just as I have described—heavy buttocks, phenomenal strength, pugnacity, even the appearance of male characters. The last I figure to be the turning point. This animal should before very long grow weak and die from exhaustion. Looking back at the experience with Bonita I feel that she had reached her turning point also, and would have died in typical exhaustion. This experiment has helped me understand her case, the case of Bonita."

THE EDITOR'S PAGE (Continued from page 5)

know or remember at the moment, and there is not time for the needful research. But where it is possible, I'll see what can be done.

For example, in the present issue: *Seabury Quinn* is still with us, as of this writing, but I do not have his birth-date handy; I'll try to dig it up next time. *Sam Moskowitz* has told us what he has managed to find on *John Campbell Haywood*. *Jay Tyler* still liveth; beyond that I can say no more; and I know even less than that about *R. Anthony Clark Ashton Smith* was born in 1893, and died in 1961. I cannot tell you *Edmond Hamilton's* birthday at the moment, but both his agent and I expect that he'll sign the check he receives for one-time reprint rights to his story in this issue.

If any reader wants to send me a list of birthdates and expiration dates for authors I've used in the past, I'll gladly use same and proclaim his name as a Doer of Good (not to be confused with a "do-gooder", which is something else entirely). RAWL

Coming Next Issue

I was at the foot of my bed when suddenly I stopped. I looked incredulously through the open window; then I raced to the sill and stood staring into the blackness of the island.

There was a lighted lantern out there—a solitary lantern hanging in the darkness. I peered closer, and as my eyes widened, I saw the vague, mist-enshrouded outline of a castle. I saw that the lantern was hanging from the castle wall.

How far away this dwelling was, I could not determine because of the darkness. It seemed to stand on the prominence of a cliff, just as Farquhar's castle stood. On the top was a tall, machicolated tower, as there was on Camelot. A sort of fog hung over the castle, twisting and warping its bulky walls as a nightmare twists and warps a vision. But clearly I saw its lantern growing brighter, and dimming suddenly as wreaths of fog closed over it.

I stood looking at this uncanny dwelling for only a few seconds, when I saw a shadowy figure appear on its balcony, dim, hazy, minute, yet the black figure of a man standing on the parapet balcony.

At that moment, I heard the scraping of Farquhar's feet on the stone nearby. I leaned out the window and glanced along the side of the castle. There he was, not ten feet away from me, standing on an identical parapet balcony. He was like a cowed phantom, his sharp eyes staring intently at the castle opposite. Then he, too, must have seen that hazy figure, for he stood motionless for several horrible seconds, then leaned forward and drew an arrow from the quiver by his feet. He nocked it in his bow string...

My bow moved closer to the parapet and leaned out. He was slightly inclined as he sought out that man's position; then suddenly he straightened upright and raised the bow to his shoulder. His Herculean arms drew it out and back, bent it in a huge arc. He raised his pointed chin and took careful aim,

What Secret From Past Centuries Could Explain

THE LAST ARCHER

by EARL PEIRCE, Jr.

The Return Of The Sorcerer

by Clark Ashton Smith

I HAD BEEN OUT OF WORK for several months, that grim year of 1930; my savings were perilously near the vanishing point. Therefore I was naturally elated when I received from John Carnby a favorable answer inviting me to present my qualifications in person. Carnby had advertised for a secretary, stipulating that all applicants must offer a preliminary statement of their capacities by letter, and I had written in response to the advertisement.

Carnby, no doubt, was a scholarly recluse who felt averse to contact with a long waiting-list of strangers; and he had chosen this manner of weeding out beforehand many, if not all, of those who were ineligible. He had specified his requirements fully and succinctly, and these were of such

The unabridged, original edition of this frightful book told of the horror; but would the remedy it suggested be of any use?

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The second issue of *THE ARKHAM COLLECTOR* (issued quarterly by August Derleth, Arkham House: Publishers, Sauk Wisconsin 53583; 50c the copy) informs us that another collection of CLARK ASHTON SMITH's stories is yet to come, *Other Dimensions*. This will bring the series of stories up to six; the first two, *Out of Space and Time*, and *Lost Worlds* have long been out of print. The other three thus far published, *Genius Loca*, *The Abominations of Yondo*, and *Tales of Science and Sorcery*, are still obtainable from Arkham House.

In the present story, as in a few of his others, Mr. Smith thoughtfully provides us with some quotations from the original and complete edition of the *Necronomicon*, which are not to be found in any of the translations, nor in the writings of the Old Master, H. P. Lovecraft, who discovered the dread volume the way Sir Arthur Conan Doyle discovered that promising author, John Watson, M.D. We cannot urge you, dear reader, we cannot urge you too strongly not to make experiments based upon the abridged Latin translation of this awful volume: SMS needs you!

nature as to bar even the average well-educated person. A knowledge of Arabic was necessary, among other things; and luckily I had acquired a certain degree of scholarship in this unusual tongue.

I found the address, of whose location I had formed only a vague idea, at the end of a hilltop avenue in the suburbs of Oakland. It was a large, two-story house, overshadowed by ancient oaks and dark with a mantling of unchecked ivy, among hedges of unpruned privet and shrubbery that had gone wild for many years. It was separated from its neighbors by a vacant, weed-grown lot on one side and a tangle of vines and trees on the other, surrounding the black ruins of a burnt mansion.

Even apart from its air of long neglect, there was something drear and dismal about the place—something that inhered in the ivy-blurred outlines of the house, in the furtive, shadowy windows, and the very forms of the misshapen oaks and oddly sprawling shrubbery. Somehow, my elation became a trifle less exuberant, as I entered the grounds and followed an unswept path to the front door.

When I found myself in the presence of John Carnby, my jubilation was still somewhat further diminished; though I could not have given a tangible reason for the premonitory chill, the dull somber feeling of alarm that I experienced, and the leaden sinking of my spirits. Perhaps it was the dark library in which he received me as much as the man himself—a room whose musty shadows could never have been wholly dissipated by sun or lamplight. Indeed, it must have been this; for John Carnby him-

self, in a manner, was very much the sort of person I had pictured him to be.

He had all the earmarks of the lonely scholar who has devoted patient years to some line of erudite research. He was thin and bent, with a massive forehead and a mane of grizzled hair; and the pallor of the library was on his hollow, clean-shaven cheeks. But coupled with this, there was a nerve-shattered air, a fearful shrinking that was more than the normal shyness of a recluse, and an unceasing apprehensiveness that betrayed itself in every glance of his dark-ringed feverish eyes and every movement of his bony hands. In all likelihood his health had been seriously impaired by over-application; and I could not help but wonder at the nature of the studies that had made him a tremulous wreck. But there was something about him—perhaps the width of his bowed shoulders and the bold aquiline of his facial outlines—which gave the impression of great former strength and a vigor not yet wholly exhausted.

His voice was unexpectedly deep and sonorous.

"I think you will do, Mr. Ogden," he said, after a few formal questions, most of which related to my linguistic knowledge, and in particular my mastery of Arabic. "Your labors will not be very heavy; but I want someone who can be on hand at any time required. Therefore you must live with me. I can give you a comfortable room, and I guarantee that my cooking will not poison you. I often work at night; and I hope you will not find the irregular hours too disagreeable."

No doubt I should have been overjoyed at this assurance that the secretarial position was to be mine. Instead, I was aware of a dim, unreasoning reluctance and an obscure forewarning of evil as I thanked John Carnby and told him that I was ready to move in whenever he desired.

He appeared to be greatly pleased; and the queer apprehensiveness went out of his manner for a moment.

"Come immediately—this very afternoon, if you can," he said. "I shall be very glad to have you, and the sooner the better. I have been living entirely alone for some time; and I must confess that the solitude is beginning to pall upon me. Also, I have been retarded in my labors for lack of the proper help. My brother used to live with me and assist me, but he has gone away on a long trip."

I returned to my downtown lodgings, paid my rent with the last few dollars that remained to me, packed my belongings, and in less than an hour was back at my new employer's home. He assigned me a room on

the second floor, which, though unadorned and dusty, was more luxurious in comparison with the hall-bedroom that failing funds had compelled me to inhabit for some time past. Then he took me to his own study, which was on the same floor, at the further end of the hall. Here, he explained to me, most of my future work would be done.

I could hardly restrain an exclamation of surprise as I viewed the interior of this chamber. It was very much as I should have imagined the den of some old sorcerer to be. There were tables strewn with archaic instruments of doubtful use, with astrological charts, with skull and alembics and crystals, with censers such as are used in the Catholic Church and volumes bound in worm-eaten leather with verdigris-mottled clasps. In one corner stood the skeleton of a large ape; in another, a human skeleton; and overhead a stuffed crocodile was suspended.

There were cases overlaid with hooks, and even a cursory glance at the titles showed me that they formed a singularly comprehensive collection of ancient and modern works on demonology and the black arts. There were some weird paintings and etchings on the walls, dealing with kindred themes; and the whole atmosphere of the room exhaled a medley of half-forgotten superstitions. Ordinarily I would have smiled if confronted with such things; but somehow, in this lonely, dismal house, besides the neurotic, hag-ridden Carnby, it was difficult for me to repress an actual shudder.

On one of the tables, contrasting incongruously with this melange of medievalism and Satanism, there stood a typewriter, surrounded with piles of disorderly manuscript. At one end of the room there was a small, curtained alcove with a bed in which Carnby slept. At the end opposite the alcove, between the human and simian skeletons, I perceived a locked cupboard that was set in the wall.

Carnby had noted my surprise, and was watching me with a keen, analytic expression which I found impossible to fathom. He began to speak, in explanatory tones.

"I have made a life-study of demonism and sorcery," he declared. "It is a fascinating field, and one that is singularly neglected. I am now preparing a monograph, in which I am trying to correlate the magical practices and demon-worship of every known age and people. Your labors, at least for a while, will consist in typing and arranging the voluminous preliminary notes which I have made, and in helping me to track down other references and correspondences. Your knowledge of Arabic will be invaluable to me, for I am none too well-grounded in this language myself, and I am depending for certain essential data on a

holding back a world of unsurmountable thoughts and emotions. Somehow I felt that Carnby was more nervous and upset than ever, and also that my rendering from the *Necronomicon* had in some mysterious manner contributed to his perturbation. He wore a ghastly brooding expression, as if his mind were busy with some unwelcome and forbidden theme.

However, seeming to collect himself, he asked me to translate another passage. This turned out to be a singular incantatory formula for the exorcism of the dead, with a ritual that involved the use of rare Arabian spices and the proper intoning of at least a hundred names of ghouls and demons. I copied it all out for Carnby, who studied it for a long time with a rapt eagerness that was more than scholarly.

"That, too," he observed, "is not in *Olaus Wormius*." After perusing it again, he folded the paper carefully and put it away in the same drawer from which he had taken the *Necronomicon*.

That evening was one of the strangest I have ever spent. As we sat for hour after hour discussing renditions from that unhallowed volume, I came to know more and more definitely that my employer was mortally afraid of something; that he dreaded being alone and was keeping me with him on this account rather than for any other reason. Always he seemed to be waiting and listening with a painful, tortured expectation, and I saw that he gave only a mechanical awareness to much that was said. Among the weird appurtenances of the room, in that atmosphere of unmanifested evil, of untold horror, the rational part of my mind began to succumb slowly to a recrudescence of dark ancestral fears. A corner of such things in my normal moments, I was now ready to believe in the most baleful creations of superstitious fancy. No doubt, by some process of mental contagion, I had caught the hidden terror from which Carnby suffered.

By no word or syllable, however, did the man admit the actual feelings that were evident in his demeanor, but he spoke repeatedly of a nervous ailment. More than once, during our discussion, he sought to imply that his interest in the supernatural and the Satanic was wholly intellectual, that he, like myself, was without personal belief in such things. Yet I knew infallibly that his implications were false; that he was driven and obsessed by a real faith in all that he pretended to view with scientific detachment, and had doubtless fallen a victim to some imaginary horror entailed by his occult researches. But my intuition afforded me no clue to the actual nature of this horror.

There was no repetition of the sounds that had been so disturbing to my employer. We must have sat till after midnight with the writings

of the mad Arab open before us. At last Carnby seemed to realize the lateness of the hour.

"I fear I have kept you up too long," he said apologetically. "You must go and get some sleep. I am selfish, and I forget that such hours are not habitual to others, as they are to me."

I made the formal denial of his self-impeachment which courtesy required, said good night, and sought my own chamber with a feeling of intense relief. It seemed to me that I would leave behind me in Carnby's room all the shadowy fear and oppression to which I had been subjected.

Only one light was burning in the long passage. It was near Carnby's door, and my own door at the further end, close to the stair-head, was in deep shadow. As I groped for the knob, I heard a noise behind me, and turned to see in the gloom a small, indistinct body that sprang from the hall-landing to the top stair, disappearing from view. I was horribly startled; for even in that vague, fleeting glimpse, the thing was much too pale for a rat and its form was not at all suggestive of an animal. I could not have sworn what it was, but the outlines had seemed unmentionably monstrous. I stood trembling violently in every limb, and heard on the stairs a singular bumping sound, like the fall of an object rolling downward from step to step. The sound was repeated at regular intervals, and finally ceased.

If the safety of soul and body had depended upon it, I could not have turned on the stair-light, nor could I have gone to the top steps to ascertain the agency of that unnatural bumping. Anyone else, it might seem, would have done this. Instead, after a moment of virtual petrification, I entered my room, locked the door, and went to bed in a turmoil of unresolved doubt and equivocal terror. I left the light burning, and I lay awake for hours, expecting momentarily a recurrence of that abominable sound. But the house was as silent as a morgue, and I heard nothing. At length, in spite of my anticipations to the contrary, I fell asleep and did not awaken till after many sodden, dreamless hours.

It was ten o'clock, as my watch informed me. I wondered whether my employer had left me undisturbed through thoughtfulness, or had not arisen himself. I dressed and went downstairs, to find him waiting at the breakfast table. He was paler and more tremulous than ever, as if he had slept badly.

"I hope the rats didn't annoy you too much," he remarked, after a preliminary greeting. "Something really must be done about them."

"I didn't notice them at all," I replied. Somehow, it was utterly im-

copy of the *Necronomicon* in the original Arabic text. I have reason to think that there are certain omissions and erroneous renderings in the Latin version of Olaus Wormius."

I had heard of this rare, well-nigh fabulous volume, but had never seen it. The book was supposed to contain the ultimate secrets of evil and forbidden knowledge, and moreover, the original text, written by the mad Arab, Abdul Alhazred, was said to be unprocurable. I wondered how it had come into Carnby's possession.

"I'll show you the volume after dinner," Carnby went on. "You will doubtless be able to elucidate one or two passages that have long puzzled me."

The evening meal, cooked and served by my employer himself, was a welcome change from cheap restaurant fare. Carnby seemed to have lost a good deal of his nervousness. Hewasvery talkative, and even began to exhibit a certain scholarly gaiety after we had shared a bottle of mellow Sauterne. Still, with no manifest reason, I was troubled by intimations and forebodings which I could neither analyze nor trace to their rightful source.

We returned to the study, and Carnby brought out from a locked drawer the volume of which he had spoken. It was enormously old, and was bound in ebony covers arabesqued with silver and set with darkly glowing garnets. When I opened the yellowing pages, I drew back with involuntary revulsion at the odor which arose from them—an odor that was more than suggestive of physical decay, as if the book had lain among corpses in some forgotten graveyard and had taken on the taint of dissolution.

Carnby's eyes were burning with a fevered light as he took the old manuscript from my hands and turned to a page near the middle. He indicated a certain passage with his lean forefinger.

"Tell me what you make of this," he said, in a tense, excited whisper.

I deciphered the paragraph, slowly and with some difficulty, and wrote down a rough English version with the pad and pencil which Carnby offered me. Then, at his request, I read it aloud:

"It is verily known by few, but is nevertheless an attestable fact, that the will of a dead sorcerer hath power upon his own body and can raise it up from the tomb and perform therewith whatever action was unfulfilled in life. And such resurrections are invariably for the doing of malevolent deeds and for the detriment of others. Most readily can the corpse be animated if all its members have remained intact and yet there are cases

in which the exelling will of the wizard hath reared up from death the sundered pieces of a body hewn in many fragments, and hath caused them to serve his end, either separately or in a temporary reunion. But in every instance, after the action hath been completed, the body lapseth into its former state."

Of course, all this was errant gibberish. Probably it was the strange unhealthy look of utter absorption with which my employer listened, more than that damnable passage from the *Necronomicon*, which caused my nervousness and made me start violently when, toward the end of my reading, I heard an indescribable slithering noise in the hall outside. But when I finished the paragraph and looked up at Carnby, I was more than startled by the expression of stark, staring fear which his features had assumed—an expression as of one who is haunted by some hellish phantom. Somehow, I got the feeling that he was listening to that odd noise in the hallway rather than to my translation of Abdul Alhazred.

The house is full of rats," he explained, as he caught my inquiring glance. "I have never been able to get rid of them, with all my efforts."

The noise, which still continued, was that which a rat might make in dragging some object slowly along the floor. It seemed to draw closer, to approach the door of Carnby's room, and then, after an intermission, it began to move again and receded. My employer's agitation was marked; he listened with fearful intentness and seemed to follow the progress of the sound with a terror that mounted as it drew near and decreased a little with its recession.

"I am very nervous," he said. "I have worked too hard lately, and this is the result. Even a little noise upsets me."

The sound had now died away somewhere in the house. Carnby appeared to recover himself in a measure.

"Will you please re-read your translation?" he requested. "I want to follow it very carefully, word by word."

I obeyed. He listened with the same look of unholy absorption as before, and this time we were not interrupted by any noises in the hallway. Carnby's face grew paler, as if the last remnant of blood had been drained from it, when I read the final sentences; and the fire in his hollow eyes was like phosphorescence in a deep vault.

"That is a most remarkable passage," he commented. "I was doubtful about its meaning, with my imperfect Arabic; and I have found that the passage is wholly omitted in the Latin of Olaus Wormius. Thank you for your scholarly rendering. You have certainly cleared it up for me."

His tone was dry and fromal, as if he were repressing himself and

possible for me to mention the queer, ambiguous thing which I had seen and heard on retiring the night before. Doubtless I had been mistaken; doubtless it had been merely a rat after all, dragging something down the stairs. I tried to forget the hideously repeated noise and the momentary flash of unthinkable outlines in the gloom.

My employer eyed me with uncanny sharpness, as if he sought to penetrate my inmost mind. Breakfast was a dismal affair; and the day that followed was no less dreary. Carnby isolated himself till the middle of the afternoon, and I was left to my own devices in the well-supplied but conventional library downstairs. What Carnby was doing alone in his room I could not surmise; but I thought more than once that I heard the faint, monotonous intonations of a solemn voice. Horror-breeding hints and noisome intuitions invaded my brain. More and more the atmosphere of that house enveloped and stilled me with poisonous, miasmatic mystery; and I felt everywhere the invisible brooding of malignant incubi.

It was almost a relief when my employer summoned me to his study. Entering, I noticed that the air was full of a pungent, aromatic smell and was touched by the vanishing coils of a blue vapor, as if from the burning of Oriental gums and spices in the church censers. An Isphahan rug had been moved from its position near the wall to the center of the room, but was not sufficient to cover entirely a curving violet mark that suggested the drawing of a magic circle on the floor. No doubt Carnby had been performing some sort of incantation; and I thought of the awesome formula I had translated at his request.

However, he did not offer any explanation of what he had been doing. His manner had changed remarkably and was more controlled and confident than at any former time. In a fashion almost businesslike he laid before me a pile of manuscript which he wanted me to type for him. The familiar click of the keys aided me somewhat in dismissing my apprehensions of vague evil, and I could almost smile at the recherche and terrific information comprised in my employer's notes, which dealt mainly with formulae for the acquisition of unlawful power. But still, beneath my reassurance, there was a vague, lingering disquietude.

Evening came; and after our meal we returned again to the study. There was a tenseness in Carnby's manner now, as if he were eagerly awaiting the result of some hidden test. I went on with my work; but some of his emotion communicated itself to me, and ever and anon I caught myself in an attitude of strained listening.



Illustration by Rafael de Soto

At last, above the click of the keys, I heard the peculiar slithering in the hall. Carnby had heard it, too, and his confident look had utterly vanished, giving place to the most pitiable fear.

The sound drew nearer and was followed by a dull, dragging noise, and then by more sounds of an unidentifiable slithering and scuttling nature that varied in loudness. The hall was seemingly full of them, as if a whole army of rats was hauling some carrion hooty along the floor. And yet no rodent or number of rodents could have made such sounds, or could have moved anything so heavy as the object which came behind the rest. There was something in the character of those noises, something without name or definition, which caused a slowly creeping chill to invade my spine.

"Good Lord! What is all that racket?" I cried.

"The rats! I tell you it is only the rats!" Carnby's voice was a high, hysterical shriek.

A moment later, there came an unmistakable knocking on the door,

near the sill. At the same time I heard a heavy thudding in the locked cupboard at the further end of the room. Carnby had been standing erect, but now he sank limply into a chair. His features were ashen, and his look was almost mantical with fright.

The nightmare doubt and tension became unbearable and I ran to the door and flung it open, in spite of a frantic remonstrance from my employer. I had no idea what I should find as I stepped across the sill into the dim-lit hall.

When I looked down and saw the thing on which I had almost trodden, my feeling was one of sick amazement and actual nausea. It was a human hand which had been severed at the wrist—a hony, bluish hand like that of week-old corpse, with garden-mold on the fingers and under the long nails. *The damnable thing had moved!* It had drawn back to avoid me, and was crawling along the passage somewhat in the manner of a crab! And following it with my gaze, I saw that there were other things beyond it, one of which I recognized as a man's foot and another as a forearm. I dared not look at the rest. All were moving slowly, hideously away in a charnel procession, and I cannot describe the fashion in which they moved. Their individual vitality was horrifying beyond endurance. It was more than the vitality of life, yet the air was laden with a carrion taint. I averted my eyes and stepped back into Carnby's room, closing the door behind me with a shaking hand. Carnby was at my side with the key, which he turned in the lock with palsy-stricken fingers that had become as feeble as those of an old man.

"You saw them?" he asked in a dry, quavering whisper.

"In God's name, what does it all mean?" I cried.

Carnby went back to his chair, tottering a little with weakness. His lineaments were agonized by the gnawing of some inward horror, and he shook visibly like an ague patient. I sat down in a chair beside him, and he began to stammer forth his unbelievable confession, half incoherently, with inconsequential mouthings and many breaks and pauses:

"He is stronger than I am—even in death, even with his body dismembered by the surgeon's knife and saw that I used. I thought he could not return after that—after I had buried the portions in a dozen different places, in the cellar, beneath the shrubs, at the foot of the ivy-vines. But the *Necronomicon* is right . . . and Helman Carnby knew it. He warned me before I killed him, he told me he could return—even in that condition.

"But I did not believe him. I hated Helman, and he hated me, too. He had attained to higher power and knowledge and was more favored by the Dark Ones than I. That was why I killed him—my own twin-

brother, and my brother in the service of Satan and of Those who were before Satan. We had studied together for many years. We had celebrated the Black Mass together and we were attended by the same familiars. But Helman Carnby had gone deeper into the occult, into the forbidden, where I could not follow him. I feared him, and I could not endure his supremacy.

"It is more than a week—it is ten days since I did the deed. But Helman—or some part of him—has returned every night . . . God! His accursed hands crawling on the floor! His feet, his arms, the segments of his legs, climbing the stairs in some unmentionable way to haunt me! . . . Christ! His awful, bloody torso lying in wait! I tell you, his hands have come even by day to tap and fumble at my door . . . and I have stumbled over his arms in the dark.

"Oh, God! I shall go mad with the awfulness of it. But he wants me to go mad, he wants to torture me till my brain gives way. That is why he haunts me in this piece-meal fashion. He could end it all at any time, with the demoniacal power that is his. He could re-knit his sundered limbs and body and slay me as I slew him.

"How carefully I buried the parts, with what infinite forethought! And how useless it was! I buried the saw and the knife, too, at the further end of the garden, as far away as possible from his evil, itching hands. But I did not bury the head with the other pieces—I kept it in that cupboard at the end of my room. Sometimes I have heard it moving there, as you heard it a little while ago . . . But he does not need the head, his will is elsewhere, and can work intelligently through all his members.

"Of course, I locked all the doors and windows at night when I found that he was coming back . . . But it made no difference. And I have tried to exorcise him with the appropriate incantations—with all those that I knew. Today I tried that sovereign formula from the *Necronomicon* which you translated for me. I got you here to translate it. Also, I could no longer bear to be alone and I thought that it might help if there were someone else in the house. That formula was my last hope. I thought it would hold him—it is a most ancient and most dreadful incantation. But, as you have seen, it is useless . . ."

His voice trailed off in a broken mumble, and he sat staring before him with sightless, intolerable eyes in which I saw the beginning flare of madness. I could say nothing—the confession he had made was so ineffably atrocious. The moral shock, and the ghastly, supernatural horror, had almost stupefied me. My sensibilities were stunned; and it was not

The Three From The Tomb

by Edmond Hamilton

They had seen Willis Bartley's decaying body;
now he had walked into his house, unmistakably
alive!

Farnsworth Wright sent back the first manuscript that young EDMOND HAMILTON sent him, in 1925, but accepted a revision a year later, with considerable enthusiasm. That was *The Monster-God of Mammoth*, which originally appeared in the August 1926 issue of *WEIRD TALES*, and was reprinted by popular demand in the September 1935 issue. We re-ran it in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* #14, Winter 1965/67. From then on, Mr. Hamilton received no rejections from Editor Wright, and became one of the most popular WT authors; I count 76 stories under his own name there, the last being *The Watcher of the Ages*, in the September 1948 issue. (His final appearance, however was in the May 1951 issue, when *The Isle of the Sleeper* was reprinted from the May 1938 edition.)

His science fiction started to appear in the science fiction magazines with *The Comet Doom*, in the January 1928 issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, and here the end is not yet—nor would we or his countless other admirers desire it to be.

"HOWARD CLAY RETURNED? It's impossible—Howard Clay has been dead for six months!"

Peter Todd, county detective of the Castletown district, almost shouted the words into the telephone, Jerry Farley, the young reporter who had been lounging in Todd's office, sprang to the detective's side. He heard a woman's excited voice from the receiver.

"We'll be there in ten minutes, Mrs. Clay!" Todd answered. He slammed the receiver down and turned to the reporter.

"There's a story for you, Farley! Howard Clay has been dead and buried for six months and his wife says that five minutes ago he walked into their house with Doctor Charles Curtlin—living!"

"That's not a story—it's a headline!" cried Farley, making for the door. "Come on, Todd—what's delaying you?"

In something less than ten minutes Todd's high-powered open car, driven by his subordinate, Jackson, had whirled across Castletown's traffic-choked business district, and was speeding through the tree-shaded suburbs westward. The car drew up in front of a large, rambling brick house with extensive grounds.

A small cluster of excited men and women were gathered on the sidewalk, peering in at the house and talking rapidly. A blue-clad patrolman was hurrying to disperse them and Todd ordered Jackson to remain at the street for the same purpose. Then he and Farley went quickly up the walk toward the brick mansion's pretentious entrance.

Todd was reaching toward the bell-push when the door was flung

till I had begun to recover myself that I felt the irresistible surge of a flood of loathing for the man beside me.

I rose to my feet. The house had grown very silent, as if the macabre and charnel army of beleaguement had now retired to its various graves. Carnby had left the key in the lock; and I went to the door and turned it quickly.

"Are you leaving? Don't go," Carnby begged in a voice that was tremulous with alarm, as I stood with my hand on the doorknob.

"Yes, I am going," I said coldly. "I am resigning my position right now; and I intend to pack my belongings and leave your house with as little delay as possible."

I opened the door and went out, refusing to listen to the arguments and pleadings and protestations he had begun to babble. For the nonce, I preferred to face whatever might lurk in the gloomy passage, no matter how loathsome and terrifying, rather than endure any longer the society of John Carnby.

The hall was empty; but I shuddered with repulsion at the memory of what I had seen, as I hastened to my room. I think I should have screamed aloud at the least sound or movement in the shadows.

I began to pack my valise with a feeling of the most frantic urgency and compulsion. It seemed to me that I could not escape soon enough from that house of abominable secrets, over which hung an atmosphere of smothering menace. I made mistakes in my haste, I stumbled over chairs, and my brain and fingers grew numb with a paralyzing dread.

I had almost finished my task, when I heard the sound of slow measured footsteps coming up the stairs. I knew that it was not Carnby, for he had locked himself immediately in his room when I had left; and I felt sure that nothing could have tempted him to emerge. Anyway, he could hardly have gone downstairs without my hearing him.

The footsteps came to the top landing and went past my door along the hall, with that same, dead monotonous repetition, regular as the movement of a machine. Certainly it was not the soft, nervous tread of John Carnby.

Who, then, could it be? My blood stood still in my veins; I dared not finish the speculation that arose in my mind.

The steps paused; and I knew that they had reached the door of Carnby's room. There followed an interval in which I could scarcely breathe; and then I heard an awful crashing and shattering noise, and above it the soaring scream of a man in the uttermost extremity of fear.

I was powerless to move, as if an unseen iron band had reached

forth to restrain me; and I have no idea how long I waited and listened. The scream had fallen away in a swift silence; and I heard nothing now, except a low, peculiar, recurrent sound which my brain refused to identify.

It was not my own volition, but a stronger will than mine, which drew me forth at last and impelled me down the hall to Carnby's study. I felt the presence of that will as an overpowering, superhuman thing—a demonic force, a malign mesmerism.

The door of the study had been broken in and was hanging by one hinge. It was splintered as by the impact of more than mortal strength. A light was still burning in the room, and the unmentionable sound I had been hearing ceased as I neared the threshold. It was followed by an evil, utter stillness.

Again I paused, and could go no further. But, this time, it was something other than the hellish, all-pervading magnetism that petrified my limbs and arrested me before the sill. Peering into the room, in the narrow space that was framed by the doorway and lit by an unseen lamp, I saw one end of the Oriental rug, and the gruesome outlines of a monstrous, unmoving shadow that fell beyond it on the floor. Huge, elongated, misshapen, the shadow was seemingly cast by the arms and torso of a naked man who stooped forward with a surgeon's saw in his hand. Its monstrosity lay in this: though the shoulders, chest, abdomen and arms were all clearly distinguishable, the shadow was headless and appeared to terminate in an abruptly severed neck. It was impossible, considering the relative position, for the head to have been concealed from sight through any manner of foreshortening.

I waited, powerless to enter or withdraw. The blood had flowed back upon my heart in an ice-thick tide, and thought was frozen in my brain. An interval of termless horror, and then, from the hidden end of Carnby's room, from the direction of the locked cupboard, there came a fearsome and violent crash, and the sound of splintering wood and whining hinges, followed by the sinister, dismal thud of an unknown object striking the floor.

Again there was silence—a silence as of consummated Evil brooding above its unnamable triumph. The shadow had not stirred. There was a hideous contemplation in its attitude, and the saw was still held in its poised hand, as if above a completed task.

Another interval, and then, without warning, I witnessed the awful and unexplainable *dissintegration* of the shadow, which seemed to break gently

(Turn to page 119)

open. A dark-haired, middle-aged woman whose face was deathly pale almost pulled them into the hall inside.

"Thank God you've come, Mr. Todd!" she cried. "The servants are all gone—they fled in terror when they first saw him."

"When they saw whom, Mrs. Clay?" Todd asked crisply.

"My husband—Howard Clay! He walked into the house with Doctor Curtlin hardly twenty minutes ago. I fainted when I saw him, and when I came to I found they had placed me on a couch and had gone into the library—and since my first thought was to call help, I called you."

"Howard Clay living?" Todd said incredulously. "You're surely suffering from a delusion—it's been a half-year since Clay died and was buried, with half the town at his funeral!"

"I know that." Her voice rose. "I was with him when he died—but he's living now!"

"That is quite correct, Mr. Todd."

They all turned. Two men had come into the hall behind them, from an adjoining room.

One of them was tall and black-haired, with keen black eyes and strong-cut face. But it was the other, the man who had spoken, who held Todd and Farley thunderstruck. He was short and thickset, with graying hair. His plump face was dead-white as though all blood had been drained from it. He was returning their gaze quietly and both the detective and the reporter recognized him in the first mind-dazing moment.

"Great God—Howard Clay!" Todd exclaimed.

"Howard Clay—living—living!" choked Farley.

"Quite correct," Clay repeated. "May I ask why you gentlemen came here?"

Todd gripped himself. "Why did we come? We came to find out what this means, Clay. You were supposed to have died six months ago."

"I did die six months ago," said Clay quietly.

"What?" Todd cried. "Do you mean to say—"

"I mean to say that six months ago I did die and was buried and that I lay dead in my tomb until yesterday I was brought back to life."

"Brought back to life? By whom?"

"By Doctor Curtlin here, I remember dying, and between that and the time I woke up in Curtlin's laboratory yesterday there is nothing in my mind but darkness."

Todd stared, stunned, from one to the other. Curtlin smiled. "Don't look so dazed, Todd," he said. "Every great scientific discovery of the

past has seemed just as incredible to those who first heard of it as this seems to you."

Farley's mind was working again. "Doctor Curtlin—I remember now," he exclaimed. "You're the physician who kicked up the stir in medical circles two years ago with a claim that you could rebuild and revivify disintegrating life-cells by a new combination of rays."

"That is the basis of my process," Curtlin admitted. "Naturally, I am not going to give its details to any one."

"But you took Clay's body from the tomb," said the awed reporter, "you brought him back to life with that process—"

The voice of the woman behind him interrupted him. "Then you were dead, Howard!" she cried. "I knew that you were—I knew—"

Clay's face softened. "I was, but I am living now, Helen," he said. "I would have spared you this shock if I could have." He took a step toward her.

"Don't come near me!" she screamed. "You can't be living now when you say yourself that you were dead! I followed you myself to your tomb, and now—oh God, now you've come back!"

"Helen, I am living!" Clay desperately insisted. "I did die, but I've been brought back to life just as an unconscious man can be brought back to consciousness."

"I only know that you died and were buried!" she cried. "I won't stay here with you. I'm going to leave this house now!"

"Helen, do I mean nothing more to you than that?" Clay pleaded.

"Does the twenty years we lived together mean nothing?"

"I lived those years with a living man," she said unsteadily. "I can't—I can't live with a dead one."

She turned and stumbled from the hall. Clay's face held anguish as he turned toward the others.

"Clay, come out with the truth," Todd urged. "You feigned death and disappeared for some reason, and now you're trying to explain it with this insane story of Curtlin's."

"Is it so insane, Todd?" Curtlin asked. "Life is a mere chemical activity in certain organic substances—is it insane to think that when that activity halts it can be started again?"

Todd ignored him. "You had some reason for disappearing, Clay," he insisted. "Didn't you tell me a short time before your supposed death that you were uneasy about some threats that had been made against you?"

"I did tell you that but I was wrong," Clay said dully. "It is all as I have said—I died in this house and knew nothing more until I woke in Curtlin's laboratory."

Todd turned to the other. "Curtlin, do you realize what this story of yours will do when it gets out? Millions of people will believe it—will believe that you have actually brought a man back from the dead. Intelligent people will know that it is a fake of some kind, but masses of the ignorant will put full faith in it and it will loose among them a terrific wave of superstition, fanaticism and insanity."

"I care nothing whatever of the opinions of either the intelligent or ignorant," Curtlin calmly answered. "I am giving this experiment of mine a complete test and when I have done so it's my intention to stop—and not until then."

"So you both stick to the story?" Todd said. "It won't do, Clay—sooner or later the truth will be found out!"

"There is nothing to find out," Clay said wearily. "I have told you the truth—please go now, both of you."

Todd turned helplessly, and Farley followed him out of the door into the late autumn sunlight.

The crowd in the street had increased in numbers despite the efforts of Jackson and the patrolman, those in it gazing with awe-struck faces toward the house. Few seemed in any desire to go closer to the house of the man who had come back from death, but a ripple of excited voices was heard as Todd and Farley emerged.

Todd paid no attention to them other than to bid the patrolman to retain his post in front of the house. In a low voice he ordered Jackson to remain and keep an unobtrusive watch over the Clay place, and then he and Farley climbed into the car. Todd paused, though, as he was about to start the car.

The door of the Clay residence had opened and Helen Clay was coming down the walk, a small suitcase in her hand. She moved like one in a dream, her face devoid of color, and the whispering onlookers hastily made way for her as she stepped toward a hastily summoned taxicab that had just dashed up. Todd and Farley glimpsed the dead-white face of Clay staring from a window after the cab as it drove away. It vanished in a moment, and Todd drove away.

When they reached his office in the graystone county building a little later, Todd and Farley reached together for the telephones. For the next minutes Farley poured a stream of facts into the ears of an eager city editor. He learned that already the wildest rumors concerning Clay's

return from the dead and Curtlin's part in it were sweeping through the city. When he hung up he found that Todd too had finished and was staring at the wall with knitted brows.

"This business is incredible, Farley," Todd said. "I've been talking to Helm, the doctor who attended Clay and signed his death certificate, and Morton, the undertaker who had charge of his burial."

"What did they say?" asked the reporter quickly.

"Helm said that Clay died quite suddenly from heart-failure and that there was not the slightest doubt he was dead—his heart having stopped, his lungs collapsed, and rigor mortis setting in. He said he'd swear that Clay was not in any cataleptic condition or trance but was stone-dead. Morton said the same thing—that he'd prepared Clay for burial himself, and that he'd take oath that he was dead."

"Good Lord!" Farley exclaimed. "Then Curtlin *did* bring him back to life—man dead for months!"

"He did not!" Todd said savagely. "Clay is living now and that means he was never dead."

"But Helm and Morton are men of unimpeachable character—they both knew Clay and you say they swear he was dead. His wife says he was dead—she can't believe he's living now—and Clay himself admits it."

"I'll never believe that Curtlin or any other man can bring the dead to life," Todd asserted. "There's something behind this—this fantastic story of Curtlin reviving the dead is only a blind to conceal the true facts as to Clay's disappearance and return."

"But why should Clay have wanted to disappear? He had no financial worries, being a millionaire two or three times over. He wasn't mixed up with any woman, for you saw how devoted he is to his wife."

"You heard him admit that he told me before his supposed death about threats made to him," Todd reminded. "That has something to do with this—I wish I knew just what."

"You mean that Clay feigned death to escape some danger? I don't believe it! No matter what reasons he might have had, his wife and Helm and Morton all swear he was really dead, and it's impossible that they should all be in a conspiracy. Not to speak of Curtlin. Why, Curtlin's one of the biggest medical men in this part of the country! He has a record in a half-dozen lines—is a brilliant biologist, a brilliant bacteriologist, a brilliant plastic surgeon and I don't know what else. Curtlin would hardly lend himself to a conspiracy such as you seem to think exists."

"Then you think Curtlin did take Clay's six-months' dead body from his tomb and bring it back to life?" Todd asked unbelievably.

"I think that, and it's what the city and the nation and the world will think when this news spreads," Farley asserted. "Todd, your criminal experience has warped you—you're not up against some petty plot here but against an epoch-making scientific achievement. To bring the dead back to life—why, Curtlin's name will be ringing around the world in a few days!"

Todd rose. "You may be right, but while it's ringing I'm going to follow this case in my own warped and petty way. And I'm going to find out first whether there was actually a body buried in Howard Clay's coffin and whether Curtlin did take that body."

"You're fighting against facts, but I'll stay with you," Farley said. "You're going to the cemetery now?"

The detective nodded. "The Clay vault is in Greenview—it's just at the edge of town."

The autumn twilight was thickening when Todd and Farley reached the cemetery. It lay on a long slope just beyond the suburbs, a forest of white stones and shafts that showed palely in the dusk. In summer sunlight the place would have seemed peaceful, but beneath the chill and darkness of gathering night it was oppressive.

The two drove through its curving white roads toward the adjoining cottage of the cemetery's caretaker. When they reached the small stone house they had hardly knocked before the door opened. A thin, elderly man with worried countenance faced them, and Farley thought that he paled as he recognized them.

"You're Binns, the caretaker here, aren't you?" Todd asked, as they stepped inside.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Todd." The man seemed making an effort to remain calm. "When I heard the news from town I thought you'd be out here soon."

"You've heard about Howard Clay's return?" Todd asked keenly. "Then you know why I came out here?"

"I do, and I may as well tell you the truth straight off. There is no body in Howard Clay's coffin and there hasn't been for the last four months!"

"Go on," said Todd grimly.

"I will, sir. Four months ago I was awakened near midnight by a sound out in the cemetery. I dressed hastily and went out with my electric lantern, just in time to see a truck running without lights turn out of the

cemetery and speed away. I was alarmed and began an immediate inspection to see what had been taking place.

"I found that the Clay vault had been broken into and that Howard Clay's coffin was empty. But I found more than that, too. Two other vaults had been broken into, the Barton and Kingley ones. And in those the coffins of Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley were empty.

"The three bodies that had been taken were those of the three richest and most important men who had died in the last year. Because of that I knew that if I reported it I would lose my job at once, so said nothing in the hope that the robbery would not be discovered. Now this return of Howard Clay has brought it all out, but I'm telling you the whole truth. Whoever took Clay's body took those of Barton and Kingley too."

2

"BARTON AND KINGLEY'S BODIES gone too!" Farley gasped. "Todd, this must mean—"

"It means complications," said Todd, his face grim. "Binns, did you have no clue at all as to who committed the robbery?"

"None at all sir—I just got a glimpse of the truck and that was all," the caretaker answered. "But they're saying in town that Doctor Curtlin admitted taking Howard Clay's body and bringing him back to life. That means it must have been he who took the bodies of Barton and Kingley, too."

"Whether he did or not," Todd said, "will have to be proved. Binns, before long there will be a flock of reporters and curious people out here asking you about Howard Clay's coffin. Tell them all you've told us, except the part about Barton and Kingley. Don't let any one know that any bodies other than that in Clay's coffin were taken."

"I won't," the other promised. "You'll maybe put in a word for me with the cemetery directors?"

"If you do as I've asked," Todd agreed. "I want to use your telephone for a moment now and then Farley and I are going back."

When Todd finished his brief telephone conversation and joined Farley in the car, darkness had fallen. He switched on the lights and was silent as they drove back out through the cemetery's winding ways.

"Well," Farley finally said, "this must have convinced you that you were wrong about Curtlin and Clay, Todd."

"Why should it?" the detective countered. "I expected to find that Howard Clay's coffin had been robbed."

"But you didn't expect the bodies of Barton and Kingley to be gone too! That fact alone shows that this was no mere plot to cover up Clay's disappearance, for in that case why should these two other bodies have been taken?"

"Why do you think they were taken?" Todd asked.

"I think Curtlin took all three bodies to subject to his process," Farley affirmed promptly, "and that with the process he has already brought the first of the three, Howard Clay, back to life. Curtlin said himself that he meant to give his process a complete test and then drop it, once and for all, and I think that means he is going to bring Barton and Kingley back to life too."

"Howard Clay, Willis Barton, and Stephen Kingley," mused the detective. "Why did Curtlin select those three for this test, if you're right? They all died in the last year, or were supposed to have died; they were all rich, millionaires and more; and they were all of middle age or over. There's something behind those facts—something that eludes me."

"Todd, you're chasing your nose!" Farley declared. "Look at the facts. Curtlin announced two years ago that he was working on a process to restore in dead and decaying cells the chemical activity of life. Biologists and physicians who heard his address on the subject said that the idea was far-fetched but not impossible. He must have been working on the process ever since, and finally perfected it."

"To test it, he took those three bodies from the cemetery. He selected the bodies of wealthy and important citizens because, being well-known, there was no doubt as to their deaths and if he did bring them to life there could be no cries that they had never been dead. Curtlin did bring the first of them, Howard Clay, back to life, and quite naturally at once told of his experiment and its success. Those are the simple facts, Todd, but because they're too startling for you to accept you build up moonshine plots and conspiracies of whose existence you haven't one scrap of real evidence!"

Todd smiled. "I don't say you're wrong, Farley. But I do deny that Curtlin or any other scientist can work miracles."

"What are you going to do, then—tell Clay that he is really dead and ought to go back to the cemetery?"

"No, hardly that," the detective answered. "Farley, you've been in with me in lots of cases and have kept back from your paper part of what you learned when I asked you, haven't you?"

"Yes, and I get your meaning," Farley said. "You want me too to keep quiet about Barton and Kingley."

"About that, and about what we're now going to do."

"What are we going to do?"

"We're going to have a look inside the house and laboratories of Doctor Charles Curtlin," Todd told him.

"Todd, that's a risky business, without a search warrant."

"Not too risky—my telephone call back there was to Jackson. He's still watching Clay's house and he says Curtlin is still there. That gives us a free hand, for I doubt that Curtlin would have any servants outside his place at night."

"I'll be wasted effort," Farley predicted, "prowling around Curtlin's place when other reporters are getting interviews from him. But I'm with you, and I'll give that wolf of a city editor no more than you say."

"All right, then—Curtlin's place is over in the northern district," Todd told him. "House, office, and laboratories combined—we'll be there in ten minutes."

Thereafter they were silent as Todd drove across the outlying sections of the city. He kept to the greater darkness of the lesser arteries of traffic, avoiding the light-rimmed lanes in which the golden headlights of many cars swept in toward the central city in a shining stream. They could hear newsboys shouting extras as they crossed these busier streets, and the excited voices of men who that night in 1931 had but one subject for conversation.

They soon entered into a district of old-fashioned houses, for the most part surrounded by spacious grounds. Todd stopped the car by the curb in the darkness between two street-lights, and he and Farley emerged from it without words. The detective led the way at once from the broad street into an unlighted alley or way running parallel with it some distance behind it.

The blackness was chartless to the reporter but Todd appeared to know his way. They followed the unpaved alley for a few minutes, passing between two rows of houses all of a thousand feet apart, visible only by their lighted windows. Then Todd made a cautioning gesture, led in past a low garage-building and toward a large stone house which was completely dark.

It also was surrounded by a large plot of ground, and the two crossed a service-lawn and a small garden and then stood motionless by its wall, listening. There was no sound from within or around the place, and Farley's spirits rose. It had been his fear that the unparalleled sensation of which Curtlin was the center would have brought a horde of the curious to the place, but it was evident that the news of the work Curtlin

had carried on there had been enough to make the place conspicuously shunned after night.

Todd seemed satisfied that the coast was clear, for he now led on again. He stopped by a basement window and crouched over this. It was locked, but Todd worked at it with a glittering little instrument. There came the snap of severing steel, and he softly swung the window open, then swung silently down into the dark interior.

His face reappeared as a white blur inside the dark window, his hand beckoning wordlessly. Farley swung down after him, Todd holding and steadying the reporter. They stood touching, listening. There was no sound from the house above them. Todd moved, and then from his pocket-flash a little light-beam winked through the darkness.

It disclosed the fact that they were standing in a furnace-room. Todd located the door, and they passed through it to find themselves in a short hall.

Across this hall from them a steel door faced them, and beside them a flight of steps led upward. Todd motioned toward the door.

"That will be the laboratory," he whispered. "It's all I want to see tonight—we've not got time to go through the whole place."

"This door's locked," Farley reported, trying it.

"Stand aside," the detective said, "and we'll see how good its lock is."

He had taken a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, and silently and rapidly he tried them in the steel door's lock. At last there came a welcome click and the door swung open.

They went a few steps inside and then Todd's beam winked. It disclosed no windows; so he turned and found the switch beside the door, and turned on the lights.

Flooded with light, the room disclosed itself to them as a large, long laboratory. It was concrete-walled and floored, quite without windows, but with ventilation-tubes. It held an amazing array of machinery and instruments.

Todd and Farley saw a large motor-generator and a series of transformers along one side of the room. A clutter of lamps, resistances and meters were connected with them and with a series of black-cased instruments quite unfamiliar in appearance. Heavily insulated cables in overhead racks carried most of the wiring.

These cables seemed to lead to another unfamiliar instrument suspended from the ceiling, an oblong thing like a big rectangular searchlight with thick lens of quartz or dull-glass pointing downward. Directly beneath it stood a six-foot long metal table, raised on insulated standards.

Beside this was a larger table, and on it two long objects wrapped in white sheets. Todd and Farley reached them together, turned back the coverings. The reporter recoiled at what met their eyes. They were bodies, the bodies of two middle-aged men. They had been dead for some time, time already having made ravages upon the bodies, but the faces were clear, unmistakable.

"Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley!" Farley exclaimed. "It was Curtlin who took all three bodies, then, for sure!"

"I expected to find them here," said Todd, unmoved.

"But this proves for certain that I was right!" the reporter said. "Curtlin took the bodies of the three—he's already brought Clay's back to life and is no doubt getting ready to do the same with these of Barton and Kingley."

"It proves that it was Curtlin who robbed those three coffins, at least," said Todd, his voice harsh. "With Clay living I couldn't charge him with taking Clay's body, but this is different—this gives me a charge on which to hold Curtlin."

"You're surely not going to arrest Curtlin on a grave-robbing charge!" Farley exclaimed. "Why, Todd, you'll be snowed under with ridicule and indignation! No doubt Curtlin broke the letter of the law in taking the three bodies, but his bringing of one of them back to life is such a stupendous thing that he can't be held to account."

"He'll be held until he comes clean about this business," Todd answered. "I'm going to get a warrant the first thing tomorrow morning."

"Have it your own way, then," Farley said. "You'll find you're making a terrific mistake."

Todd did not answer other than to snap out the lights and lead the way into the hall again, relocking the door. They clambered out through the window by which they had entered, and in a few minutes had reached the car unobserved and were heading into town.

They found that the sensation of the afternoon had produced there an unprecedented excitement. The names of Curtlin and of Clay were on the lips of every one, and Curtlin's statement was being argued by groups on every corner. For the citizens of Castleton were divided over it.

Half of them, including all who had chanced to see Clay, were asserting that Curtlin had accomplished the greatest achievement in history. Clay was living; there could be no possible doubt as to that, and neither could there be any doubt that Clay had been dead, they argued. They pointed out that Curtlin's idea had been deemed possible by scientists when propounded two years before. Every bit of evidence supported the

fact that he had achieved the incredible and had brought back to life a man who had lain dead for months in his tomb.

Others scoffed at the possibility of such a thing. They could not deny that Clay was living, but they denied that he had ever been dead. Someone else had died and been buried in his place, they asserted. It was learned that shortly after nightfall an examination of the Clay vault at the cemetery had been made, and that as expected Clay's coffin was empty. But that did not prove, the doubters asserted, that it was Clay's body that had formerly occupied the coffin.

The city hung with tense interest upon the question as to whether Clay had or had not been dead. Helm, the doctor, and Morton, the undertaker, whom Todd had previously questioned, felt impelled to make affidavits to the effect that they had handled Howard Clay's body after his death and that he had been unquestionably dead. As both Helm and Morton were men of undoubted integrity, their statements added fuel to the flames.

Yet Curtlin, rather than Clay, was the center of interest. Clay himself had received but a single group of former friends and reporters. Seeming to shrink in dread from the blaze of publicity in which he found himself, Clay had only reiterated his statement that he had known nothing from the time he died until he had awakened in Curtlin's laboratory. Beyond that he would not talk of his experience, but Curtlin was more communicative.

Curtlin calmly stated that he had actually brought Clay's corpse into life again by the ray-process he had announced two years before, but that he did not intend ever to divulge the details of that process. It was not his plan, he added, to attempt a general resurrection of the dead, for it was his belief that the process would be useless on the dead of more than eight or nine months back. In any case, he repeated, his intention was to give the process a thorough testing and then drop it forever.

In that pronouncement of Curtlin's Farley read confirmation of his own belief. "It's just as I told you," he told Todd when they had heard. "Curtlin's going on and test the thing on those other two bodies and then drop it."

"Why should he drop it if it's actually successful?" asked Todd skeptically.

"Because he knows what it would do to the world if he kept it up, or let the process be published. Think of a world in which the dead could be brought back at will! A world in which corpses could be revived, perhaps time after time! Fear—fear of death—is the mainspring of civiliza-

tion, and Curtlin knows if he publishes his process the mainspring is broken."

Todd shook his head. "Farley, I've seen a lot of weird things happen or seem to happen in my time, but underneath every one of them I found some crooked game. Curtlin has one, though I don't know what it is. But when I get that warrant tomorrow morning and bring him in, you'll see that sooner or later he'll come out with it."

"You're wrong, Todd—you don't know how wrong," said Farley. "But I'll be here in the morning, for when you arrest Curtlin the story about the bodies of Barton and Kingley will break."

Farley left with that and reached his rooms, weary from the exciting day. He set his alarm-clock for an early hour and turned in, sinking at once into sleep.

He awoke the next morning to rush through dressing and breakfast and start at once for the gray county building. As he neared it he noticed that around it groups had formed in the morning crowds, talking excitedly. It was apparent that the sensation of the preceding day was intensified. Wondering whether Todd had already arrested Curtlin, Farley broke into a run. He gave a sigh of relief as he saw Todd and Jackson emerging rapidly from the building.

"Todd!" he exclaimed as he reached them. "You're going after Curtlin now?"

"That's off, Farley," Todd answered. "Something has happened."

"What is it?"

"You remember that we saw Willis Barton's body there in Curtlin's laboratory last night?"

"Yes, but what's happened? Has Barton's body been missed at the cemetery?"

"More than that," said Todd, grim-voiced. "Fifteen minutes ago Willis Barton walked into his own house—alive!"

3

"BARTON ALIVE!" CRIED FARLEY. "Good God, Todd, this is proof absolute of Curtlin's statement! We saw Barton's body there ourselves—a body that had been dead for months."

"It's proof that there's more to this than I thought," Todd said. "Get in the car, Farley—we're going out to see Barton now. Whatever kind of devil's work this is, I'm going to get to the bottom of it."

"You're crazy!" Farley exclaimed as the car leapt forward. "If you

don't believe in this now you're fighting what you yourself know to be the truth."

"We'll see," said Todd shortly. "There's still something I've got to see explained—still something."

The car was tearing westward across the city through the morning sunlight, dodging through the lines of city-bound commuters as Jackson drove it with increased speed through the suburbs.

"How did you get the news of Willis Barton returning?" Farley asked, holding his hat against the rush of wind.

"Lodgekeeper at Barton's place called," Todd said. "Said that a car drove in that had Barton and Doctor Curtin in it. They went into the house and then Curtin came out and drove off. The lodgekeeper had heard about Clay returning from the dead and when he saw Willis Barton doing the same thing he was scared and called me straight off."

"Thank God, Barton's family is in Europe!" Farley said. "The shock of his return might have killed his wife and daughters as it almost did Mrs. Clay."

"What was Barton supposed to have died of?" Todd asked as they rounded a turn on two wheels.

"Apoplexy, about seven months ago," the reporter answered. "But it wasn't *supposed*, Todd—he did die! Damn it, man, we saw his body ourselves last night. Curtin must have gone home last night and put his process to work on it, brought Barton back to life just as he did Clay. This clinches Curtin's statement all right."

Todd made no answer, for Jackson was bringing the car to a halt at a gateway of iron flanked by great stone pillars, from which in turn extended a long stone wall on either side.

Inside the gates and beside the lodgehouse a weather-beaten elderly man was standing guard. He peered at them, then swung the gates open.

"It's you, Mr. Todd—I am not supposed to open to any one without word from the house, but you can go on in."

"That's all right," Todd said. "We'll take the responsibility for it."

"You needn't for my sake," the other said. "I am quitting here this day—a place where the dead come back as though alive is no place for me."

The car leapt through the gateway and down a long, tree-bordered drive toward the bulky white mansion visible ahead. They drew up in front of the big building's main entrance, and Todd and Farley walked quickly up to the door. They had rung for but a minute before the door opened and a tall and truculent-looking man confronted them.

Todd and Farley gasped, unnerved. They had expected a servant to answer the door and this was the man they had come to see. They stared at him unable to believe their eyes. The tall, big-boned figure, the iron-gray hair, the strong-jawed face—it was the man they had seen lying in decay in Curtin's laboratory! But now he stood living before them. Only his face was dead-white still, as Clay's had been.

"Willis Barton!" Todd was exclaiming, half to himself. "Willis Barton, and living now!"

"Mr. Todd, this is an intrusion!" Barton barked angrily. "I gave no orders that you were to be admitted."

"My God, Barton!" Farley burst out. "Do you realize that you were dead and have been brought back—the second man in two days?"

The reporter's word seemed to unleash Barton's fury. "What if I was dead? I'm living now and I'm going to be treated as a living man and not as some museum curiosity."

"Calm down, Barton," Todd said sharply. "I've got a few questions to ask you, and living or dead you're subject to the law."

"Ask them and be done, then," Barton snapped. "I'm in no mood to go through an inquisition."

"Your death in this house was reported seven months ago. Can you say where you have been since then?"

"Of course not! I remember absolutely nothing from the moment I died until I awoke an hour ago in Curtin's laboratory."

"Did Curtin tell you that he had also brought Clay back to life?"

"He told me—yes. I can hardly believe anything of this so far, my mind is so confused."

"Did you know Curtin well before your—er—death?" Todd pursued.

"Not well," said Barton, frowning. "I was acquainted with him and knew of some of his work by reputation."

"One question more," Todd said. "About nine months ago a half-dozen important men in this town told me, at different times, that they had received mysterious and rather alarming threats. Clay was one of these, and you, Barton, were another. Did these vague threats you told me of then have anything to do with your supposed death and revival?"

"Absolutely not!" flamed Barton. "The threats I told you about were mere crank-letters—they had nothing at all to do with this, and I refuse to answer any more of your questions. I have broken no laws and I will not be treated as a criminal suspect."

"Mr. Barton, one minute," Farley detained him. "Wouldn't you give

me a short statement for publication on your sensations in dying and reviving? It would be of world-wide interest."

"I cannot," Barton answered shortly. "I promised Doctor Curtlin that I would give no information that might in any way disclose the details of his process, Gentlemen, I bid you good day."

The door shut hard and Todd and Farley stared at each other, then turned toward the car. From it Jackson had been a spectator of their interview and his voice was excited as they entered the car.

"Willis Barton all right, wasn't it? This will tear the town apart for fair!"

"It's likely to tear the world apart," Farley declared as their car swung back down the drive. "I'm beginning to see now why Curtlin is so set against letting any one know his process."

"I think I'm beginning to see why too," Todd said.

Farley turned to face him. "Todd, if you still have any skepticism as to Curtlin's achievement you're just plain crazy! We saw Willis Barton dead there in the laboratory last night—dead for months. We saw Willis Barton standing living before us now. In the name of common sense what more do you want?"

"I want one thing explained," Todd said. "Just one thing."

"Lord, look ahead here," Jackson interrupted. "Seems like half the town's out here already!"

They were nearing the gates and could see that a crowd of excited people numbering hundreds was gathered outside them, increasing rapidly. The lodgekeeper was working his best to keep them out, but while he guarded the gates newspaper and cameramen were climbing the wall on either side. A squad of police was just dashing up, emerging from their car and endeavoring to disperse the crowd.

The gates swung inward to allow their own car to pass out, and as it did so others in the crowd managed to slip through. When they were again in the street and Jackson was pointing the car toward town, Farley looked back.

"Barton's sure going to have a time with the newspapermen in the next few hours," he said. "They're pouring into town from every quarter of the compass."

"It's to be expected," Todd said. "And the thing has hardly sunk in yet—when it does there'll be hell here."

"It's put this town on the map with a bang, all right," Farley agreed. "Todd, I hope you're convinced by now that this thing is no mere criminal plot."

"I'm convinced that you're convinced," Todd answered dryly. "I'm going to see Curtlin now—are you coming with me?"

"Right with you—from now on every word of Curtlin's is news. There'll probably be more reporters at this place than at Barton's."

Farley found his prediction verified when they reached Curtlin's establishment a little later. As they drove up to the big house they saw that a dense crowd choked the street outside it, larger by several times than that they had left at Barton's. The crowd was evidently in a state of highest excitement, and blue-clad officers were trying in vain to scatter it.

Todd's badge passed him and the reporter through the officers, and they went inside. It was their first glimpse of the interior proper of the place, since in their haphazard entry of the preceding night they had confined themselves to the laboratory below. The ground floor was fitted up to hold offices and a small clinic, and these rooms were filled with several dozen excited newspapermen, cameramen and officials.

All were pressing toward Curtlin, whose tall figure rose near a corner, the center of attraction. Curtlin was answering, calmly and deliberately, the rapid-fire questions of the excited reporters.

"No, I refuse entirely to allow anyone an inspection of my laboratory," he was saying with finality. "I have said that my process shall not be divulged, and I meant it."

"But, Doctor Curtlin," one of the newspapermen pleaded. "You can't treat the reading public in this way—we have pictures of Clay and Barton and yourself and the cemetery—all we need is one of the laboratory in which you brought them back to life."

"I have not the slightest interest in the reading public," Curtlin replied. "I am carrying out a scientific experiment, and it has absolutely no concern with the public."

Todd had pushed through the throng to Curtlin's side. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind answering one or two questions of my own?" he asked.

Curtlin recognized him. "Mr. Todd, the skeptical representative of law and order," he said, his black eyes mocking. "What is it you would like to know?"

"I'd like to know, if it isn't giving anything away, just how long your process of revival takes?"

"I've no objection to telling that. After the preliminary preparations are made the ray-process itself requires only about thirty minutes."

"Can you tell us when you began using the process upon Willis Barton's body?"

"About four this morning. When I had brought him back it took a little time for him to accustom himself to what had happened and then I drove him out to his home."

If Todd was disappointed his face did not show it. He changed his tack.

"Curtlin, you'll admit, I suppose, that you were the one who took the bodies of Howard Clay and Willis Barton from the cemetery four months ago. Did you know that the body of Stephen Kingley was taken also at that time?"

"Yes," said Curtlin calmly. "I took it myself, and Kingley's body is down in my laboratory now."

His answer created a sensation among the newspapermen who had been crowding closer to listen.

"What? Do you mean to say that you're going to bring Kingley back to life too, Doctor Curtlin?" cried one of them.

"I mean just that," Curtlin replied. "I had not intended to announce it just yet, but since Todd's question has brought it out I have no objection to doing so. Four months ago I deliberately broke the law in taking from the cemetery the three bodies of Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley. I felt that I was justified in doing so by the tremendous importance of the work I meant to attempt with them."

"One moment, Doctor," a sharp-faced reporter interrupted. "It is known that you are not a rich man—did you select the bodies of these three wealthy men with the idea that they would each pay you a large fee for bringing them back to life?"

"Absolutely no!" Curtlin snapped. "I selected Clay and Barton and Kingley because it was beyond doubt that they were dead and if my experiment succeeded it could not be said that the subjects of it had never been dead. I brought the three bodies here, and for four months they have been down in my laboratory while I worked to make my process capable of the rebuilding and revivification of human tissues."

"I finally succeeded in doing so but a few days ago. I prepared Clay's body and using the process on him yesterday brought him back to life. Because there seemed doubt on the part of many as to the reality of my achievement, I used the process on Barton's corpse early this morning and was able to revive him also."

"It was and is my purpose to test the process finally on the third body, that of Kingley, and then to consider the experiment concluded and to drop it forever, to smash my apparatus and burn my notes. For as I have said, and as I firmly believe, this bringing of the dead to life is

important and valuable as a laboratory achievement but would wreck civilization if it were put into the hands of humanity. For that reason I am concluding the experiment with Kingley and am resolved never to work again on it thereafter."

"But when are you going to bring Kingley back to life, then?" Farley asked. The crowd hung tensely on the answer.

"I can see that I'll not be let alone until it's finished," Curtlin said. "Well, I've already made the preliminary chemical preparations with Kingley's body—I'll start the ray-process on it after eleven and will have him living by noon."

There was an excited burst of hoarse voices. "But you'll allow us to be here?" some one pleaded. "You'll allow us to see Kingley's body before you do it?"

"I will under certain conditions," Curtlin answered sharply. "In the first place, no one is going to enter my laboratory, during the process or before or after it. I want the police-guard here doubled to make sure of that. You may wait in these rooms, however, while the process is going on."

"In the second place, I have no objection to your seeing and examining Kingley's dead body before I begin the process. But I will have it in these rooms for you at eleven, and you'll view it here before I take it back to the laboratory. I have no objection to your satisfying any doubts you may have, but I am resolved that under no circumstances shall any one witness my process or apparatus."

"Great heavens!" cried some one. "What a story!"

"Todd—you heard!" Farley exclaimed. "This means final public proof of the thing!"

Todd's face was set. "For the present," Curtlin was saying, "I must ask all of you to leave, as I have much to do. At eleven you can return, but until then you'll find it useless to try to pass the police. I have asked here to guard the place. Please leave now, gentlemen."

"One final question!" shouted a reporter. "Will Clay and Barton, the men you've already brought to life, be here when you revive Kingley?"

"I have no doubt that they will," Curtlin said, "as both of them are naturally highly interested in my work. No more questions, now—please go."

As the excited throng poured out into the choked street Farley grasped Todd's arm. "Todd, this is the end of all doubt! You'll be here at eleven when he does it?"

"I'll be here," Todd answered. "And we'll see what we will see."

Both Farley and Todd had evidence in the next few hours of the wild and unparalleled excitement that Curtlin's new statement had let loose. The city of Castleton was seething with it, and it centered around that big, old-fashioned house, guarded by blue-clad police on all sides, that they had just left.

Farley hastened through shouting streets in which all ordinary activities had halted, to find the offices of his newspaper the scene of even greater excitement. His latest news was literally torn from him and rushed upon the press. The teletype wires that connected with the far-flung nervous system of the world's information facilities were hot with appeals for more and still more facts on this stunning thing.

The names of Curtlin and Clay and Barton and Kingley were going out to the world by telegraph and telephone and written word. Every train that entered Castleton was disgorging new scores of newspapermen, photographers and special writers. Planes were coming in from distant cities with others.

When Farley returned to Curtlin's place a full hour before the appointed hour of eleven, he found the scene there one of chaos. The streets for blocks around were packed with hoarse-voiced humanity through which he had to push his way. He reached the house to find that the double rank of police outside it were inexorably holding out the mob of reporters and citizens.

Farley, pushing to the front, saw that the house itself presented no sign of life. Of Curtlin nothing could be seen, but he learned from a fellow newsman that he had appeared for a brief moment at one of the lower windows. He learned also that save for the police who guarded it on all sides Curtlin was apparently working alone in the house, not risking the presence of any aids or servants.

As the hour of eleven approached, the crowd became denser and greater, almost unmanageable. Farley glimpsed Todd, his face still set and grave, struggling through the throng. The detective saw him and pushed toward him. There came a sudden tremendous roar of excited voices as Clay and Barton arrived, almost at the same time.

Each of the two was protected by an escort of a half-dozen policemen who pushed a way for them through the mob. Both Clay and Barton seemed stunned by the scene about them, their dead-white faces glancing desperately this way and that. The passage through the crowd of these two men whom all in it knew to have been dead created a tremendous sensation, and during it Todd reached Farley's side.

"It's almost time," Farley told the detective over the roar of voices.

"Helm and about a half-dozen doctors are in this crowd—going to make sure that Kingley is dead, all right!"

"How about Kingley's relatives?" Todd asked.

"None here. He was a bachelor with some cousins, but they're too far away to get here. But look—there's Curtlin now!"

The door of the house had opened and Curtlin had emerged onto its veranda, bareheaded and in white laboratory-jacket. Another excited roar split the air but Curtlin did not heed it, spoke crisply to the captain of the police before the house. Clay and Barton had passed through these and were joining Curtlin on the veranda, seeming half-dazed. The three passed into the house and the mob surged irresistibly forward.

Todd and Farley were in its front rank and were hastily let through by the officers. The latter were struggling to keep back the tremendous horde of the curious and admit only the limited number of officials and reporters Curtlin had specified. These hastened in and in hardly more than a minute Todd and Farley found the rooms about them filled with excited men.

Clay and Barton stood dazedly against the wall, but Curtlin stood at the center of his clinic room beside a wheeled steel table that bore a long, white-wrapped figure. The sight of that as much as Curtlin's commanding black eyes swept the rooms to silence.

"The body of Stephen Kingley is here beside me," his incisive voice told them, "and I am willing that a limited number of you ascertain for yourself that Kingley is actually dead. But there will be no crowding and no disorder or you will all be excluded from these rooms."

A tall, lanky man stepped forward. "No objection to my looking at him, I presume?" he asked.

"None at all, Doctor Helm," said Curtlin promptly. "Since I see Doctors Braun and Leonard also here they also may look, if they care. You are all competent medically and all knew Kingley by sight."

He reached and turned back the white sheet that covered the figure on the wheeled table. An involuntary sigh went up as Kingley's body was exposed, with all its evidence of death and decay. A pungent odor of strong and unfamiliar chemicals filled the room.

"Kingley, all right," said Helm after one glance at the dead-white face, and Braun and Leonard nodded. They bent over the body and then Helm straightened.

"There is no need for an examination, Doctor Curtlin," he said. "I presume that every man in this room can see that Kingley is dead and has been for some months."

"Dead, all right," said Doctor Leonard, straightening. "From heart-failure in this case also, if I remember rightly?"

"Yes," said Curtlin. "Is everyone satisfied that Kingley is dead? Mr. Todd — wouldn't you like to set your doubts at rest?"

At Curtlin's mocking challenge a laugh went up, but Todd moved to the table's side. "Don't mind if I do," he said quietly, gazing at the body before him.

When he stepped back Curtlin recovered the body with the sheet. "I am now going to take the body back down to the laboratory and subject it to the ray-process," he stated. "When I have finished you shall know; but until I do, the guards here will prevent any one from penetrating to the lower floor."

Helm and Leonard stepped forward to grasp the table's edge, but Curtlin motioned them decisively back. "Two of the officers will help me wheel this down," he told them.

He signed to two of the policemen and they grasped the light steel table at either end and proceeded with it toward the stairs leading downward. Curtlin followed them as they lifted it down the steps, and in a moment the two came back and took their place with the others guarding the door of the stairs. In a moment came the click of a steel door opening and closing beneath, and a storm of excited voices again broke out in the rooms.

"Todd, you saw for yourself?" Farley said. "It was Kingley, dead! Just as when we saw him in the laboratory last night."

"It was Kingley and he was dead, yes," Todd answered.

"You'll have to believe if he does it this time — you'll have to!"

"What's he doing down there?" asked a reporter beside them in an awed voice. "Listen!"

A steady purring sound had become audible from below, rising rapidly into a loud whine as of great dynamos. Soon it was joined by a steady buzzing.

"He's doing it!" muttered another. "He's bringing that corpse back to life! My God, are we all crazy?"

"What about it, Mr. Clay?" some one asked one of the two dead-faced men by the wall. "Can't you or Barton give us some idea as to the general nature of Curtlin's process?"

"I know nothing — nothing!" said Clay, his hands trembling.

"Listen to them outside!" Farley exclaimed. "They're going crazy out there waiting for news!"



"My God, it's Kingley!" cried Helm. "Kingley — living!"

The dull roar of voices from without was audible above the whining, buzzing sounds from below. Minutes were fleeting. Farley found his own hands shaking, but Todd's face was unchanged.

"Curtlin says he's going to wreck his apparatus as soon as this is over," some one else was saying. "If he doesn't God help humanity!"

"It's too late," another answered. "They'll get the secret of his process out of him some way, sooner or later."

"Listen!" exclaimed a reporter. "The whine and buzz had halted abruptly but as suddenly began again. Then in moments . . ."

"They've stopped again! I can't hear a thing from down there now."

Farley found Helm beside him, the doctor's face wet with sweat. "Why in God's name doesn't he finish it if he can do it?" Helm was asking. "I can't stand —"

He stopped, and the room became dead-silent. From below had come a series of vague sounds beyond recognition. Then in moments the click

of the door opening, and the shuffling sound of slow steps, on the floor beneath, on the stair.

Farley felt his skin crawling as with Todd and all about them he gazed toward the door that like a magnet held their eyes. The steps came slowly nearer, louder, and the guards at the door stepped aside. The door opened. They saw Curtlin rising up through it, his face crimson, supporting a stumbling figure wrapped in a white sheet. And that figure—that dead-white face that had stared up at them from the dead body on the table minutes before—that man—

"My God, it's Kingley—Kingley!" cried Helm, his voice unrecognizable.

"Kingley—living—"

"Todd—Todd, he's done it!" Farley yelled. The room was in wild uproar.

"I told you that I'd do it!" Curtlin's voice flared triumphantly. "The third one I've brought back—from the tomb!"

"The tomb?" said Kingley, his eyes staring, his voice thick. "But I haven't been—I haven't surely been—"

"Dead, and I've brought you back!" Curtlin cried. "Is there any of you who disbelieve now?" he challenged fiercely. "Todd, do you still believe it's all a plot? Do you want to ask Kingley whether he was dead or not?"

"I'd like to ask him something, yes!" Todd's voice stabbed.

"Go on, then!" cried Curtlin. Todd stepped to the swaying, white-wrapped man.

"Kingley, I want the answer to just one question. You were one of several men in this town who nine months ago told me your lives had been threatened. Did those threats have anything to do with all this?"

Kingley's thick tongue strove for utterance. "No, no Todd—I found out later that the threats I told you about meant nothing. But I died—they say I've been dead—"

"There's your answer, Todd!" Curtlin cried. "The same answer Clay and Barton gave you, and it smashes your childish plot-theories."

"On the contrary," Todd said. "Those three answers from Clay and Barton and Kingley are all the proofs I need."

"Proofs of what?" cried Curtlin.

"Proofs that these three men are not Clay and Barton and Kingley at all! No one ever told me of any threats and these three by remembering something they never told me proved that they are not Clay and Barton and Kingley!"

"Clay and Barton and Kingley died just as everybody thought and

these three men are their doubles—doubles prepared by Curtlin's art as a plastic surgeon! No, don't try it, Curtlin—"

Curtlin was quick, but before his gun was more than half out Todd had shot twice, from his pocket. Curtlin swayed, a red stain spreading on his white jacket, and slumped to the floor. Those in the crowded room stood petrified, transfixed.

Todd knelt beside Curtlin. Bloody foam was on the physician's lips, and a twisted smile. His breath came in choking gasps.

"You win, Todd—I underestimated you. Don't be—too hard on the three—I was moving spirit of the thing. You'll find—bodies of real Clay and Barton and Kingley hidden in laboratory—hid them one by one as I brought their doubles out. What a joke—on me—that this ends—with—me—dead—"

His head rolled back. Todd straightened to face the three white-visaged men whom all had believed Clay and Barton and Kingley.

"You three are going to face conspiracy charges and maybe more," he said, and turned to the staring police-captain. "Take them out, the back way, before that crowd out there learns the truth."

"But Todd—" Farley was choking. "How can they be doubles when we all recognized them—their friends and families recognized them—as Clay and Barton and Kingley?"

"It's simple enough," said Todd, to Farley and the spellbound men about them. "Curtlin was comparatively poor—you all knew that and commented on it. He was a brilliant plastic surgeon, as you informed me yourself, Farley, and as such could remold living faces at will. He decided to use his power in plastic surgery to bring himself millions."

"He started his plot two years ago with that address on the possibility of reviving life in dead tissues by ray-processes. Then he waited for his chance. It came between six and eight months ago when three of the rich—

(Turn page)

Robert E. Howard's Last "King Kull" Story

KINGS OF THE NIGHT

is featured in the May issue of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR

This Story Was Not Included In The Lancer Book

est men in this city all millionaires, died. They were Howard Clay, Willis Barton and Stephen Kingley.

"Curtlin had known all three by sight and he must have started out after their deaths to procure three unscrupulous accomplices who resembled Clay and Barton and Kingley in the unalterable features of height, head-shape, figure and hair and eye-coloring. Where he secure his three accomplices we won't know until they confess, but he probably found them willing enough when he showed what immense rewards they'd get.

"He brought them into this house unknown to any one, and probably with their help robbed the cemetery of the bodies of Clay and Barton and Kingley. Then began four months of arduous work for him, the remodeling of the living faces of his accomplices into exact replicas of the faces of those three dead men. All his art as a plastic surgeon he must have used, working patiently on muscle and bone and tissue, altering expression by working with supporting muscles, changing the shapes of noses and ears, letting his work heal and then going on with it. Gradually in those four months he rebuilt the faces of the three into replicas of the faces of the three dead men, using those dead faces as his models.

"A few days ago his work was finished. His three accomplices were to all appearances exact replicas in face and figure of the three dead men. Curtlin without doubt had given them handwriting of the three dead men to practice copying, and had trained them to speak in the same voices as Clay and Barton and Kingley. He had equipped them too with a minute store of knowledge concerning the lives and friends of the three dead men so that they could pass as them in every particular.

"One thing he may not have foreseen was the dead-whiteness of their faces after the plastic surgery had healed, but that fitted in with Curtlin's plan well enough, for that whiteness would seem natural in men brought back from the dead. Curtlin was all ready therefore to set his plan to working.

"That plan was none other than to install his three accomplices in the identities of Clay and Barton and Kingley by explaining that he had raised them by his process from death. That would make the three the masters of the millions of the three dead men, and Curtlin in turn by his hold over them would be master over all three. It was an incredibly daring plan, but it had every chance of succeeding. For even though many might not believe that he had actually revived the three from death, they would not question that the three really were Clay and Barton and Kingley. They would simply believe in that case that Clay and Barton and Kingley had never been dead at all.

"He began with Clay. He had Clay's body as he said and then drove with the pseudo-Clay to the latter's home. Even his wife believed that it was Clay, and knowing that her husband had really been dead she was terror-stricken. She called us, and though I was overwhelmed myself by the sight of Clay living I thought to ask that question about threats he had formerly reported to me. If he said that he didn't remember any such occurrence it could be Clay, but if he pretended to remember, it wasn't Clay but an impostor. He did pretend to remember, and I knew that though he was the image of Clay the man before me was not Clay.

"I still could hardly believe it, though. Farley and I learned that the bodies of Barton and Kingley had been taken also from the cemetery, and when we penetrated Curtlin's laboratory last night we found those bodies in it, with the elaborate apparatus he had faked in case any one entered the laboratory. The pseudo-Barton and pseudo-Kingley were probably then hiding in the upper floors of the house. Clay's body was not to be seen, for as he said, he had hidden it after the pseudo-Clay's first appearance.

"This morning came the news of Barton's return to life and we went out to see him. I tested him also. To all appearances he was Barton, the man we had seen dead hours before, but when I spoke of the threats I said he had told me of before his death, he pretended to remember also and I knew that he also was an impostor. I began to understand Curtlin's game then, and I waited for him to stage a revival of Kingley too.

"He did it, here, and I was waiting to test Kingley, the last of the three, with the same question. You saw that he too pretended to remember something the real Kingley never said, and that was proof that all three were impostors and I confronted Curtlin with it. He saw the game was lost and in a mad access of hate drew his gun in an effort to kill me, and got killed himself.

"That's all there was to it. If those tests had not shown me that the three supposed returners from death were impostors, Curtlin's achievement would have been accepted as real. You all saw Kingley's dead body and then saw him bring up the pseudo-Kingley whom he had hidden down in the laboratory. And Curtlin would never have needed to repeat his supposed achievement, for he need only plead as he did that to continue it would wreck civilization. Whatever argument there was, no one would ever have questioned that his three accomplices were other-

than Clay and Barton and Kingley. He played for millions—played brilliantly—but he lost."

"Then it was all a fake—and it took us in!" cried one of the newspapermen, half dazedly. "But at that it's as big a story as if it were true."

"One side, there!" cried others. "Let me at a telephone, will you?"

In a moment they were all struggling out of the door, and then a swelling roar of voices told that the crowd outside was learning the truth.

Farley faced Todd, still dumfounded. "Todd, when I think that we all stepped right into Curtin's deceptions and then bawled you out for not following us—"

"Forget it, Farley," the other advised. "It's fifty-fifty—I didn't like to hold out on you but didn't want Curtin to know I was nearing the truth."

"And to think that Clay and Barton and Kingley remained dead and in this house through it all," the reporter marvelled.

Todd nodded gravely. "We'll find their bodies hidden down there in laboratory, and their families can give them another funeral or not as they see fit. Dead through it all—yes, they were the real three from the tomb, and they're going back there to stay."



The Return of the Sorcerer

(Continued from page 89)

and easily into many different shadows ere it faded from view. I hesitate to describe the manner, or specify the places, in which this singular disruption, this manifold cleavage, occurred. Simultaneously, I heard the muffled clatter of a metallic implement on the Persian rug, and a sound that was not that of a single body but of many bodies falling.

Once more there was silence—a silence as of some nocturnal cemetery, when grave-diggers and ghouls are done with their macabre toil, and the dead alone remain.

Drawn by that baleful mesmerism, like a somnambulist led by an unseen demon, I entered the room. I knew with a loathly prescience the sight that awaited me beyond the sill—the *double* heap of human segments, some of them fresh and bloody, and others already blue with beginning putrefaction and marked with earth-stains, that were mingled in abhorrent confusion on the rug.

A reddened knife and saw were protruding from the pile; and a little to one side, between the rug and the open cupboard with its shattered door, there reposed a human head that was fronting the other remnants in an upright posture. It was in the same condition of insipid decay as the body to which it had belonged; but I swear that I saw the fading of a malignant exultation from its features as I entered. Even with the marks of corruption upon them, the lineaments bore a manifest likeness to those of John Carnby, and plainly they could belong only to a twin brother.

The frightful inferences that smothered my brain with their black and clammy cloud are not to be written here. The horror which I beheld—and the greater horror which I surmised—would have put to shame hell's foulest enormities in their frozen pits. There was but one mitigation and one mercy: I was compelled to gaze only for a few instants on that intolerable scene. Then, all at once, I felt that something had withdrawn from the room; the malign spell was broken, the overpowering volition that had held me captive was gone. It had released me now, even as it had released the dismembered corpse of Helman Carnby. I was free to go; and I fled from the ghastly chamber and ran headlong through an unlit house and into the outer darkness of the night.

the cauldron

David Charles Pashow asks a very pointed question when he inquires: "What differentiates a story that might appear in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* and a story which might appear in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*? Jules de Grandin and Doctor Satan are equally at home in both. There seems little difference between an 'eerie—strange—unusual' and 'bizarre—frightening—gruesome' tale. 'Williamson' (MOH #17) could easily fit into SMS, just as *The Tenants of Broussac* (SMS #4) could fit into MOH.

"This is not a criticism, but rather a bit of curiosity. Are there any valid distinctions between the two magazines, or was it merely a question of wanting to publish another horror magazine, and having it stand on its own, and not merely being *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* The Second?"

Yes, there are intended distinctions between *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* even though it was also intended that, to an extent, the contents could be interchangeable. At times, copy sent to the printer for one, has been used without too much hesitation in the other.

Perhaps it would help for me to mention a few stories in each maga-

zine which I do not feel would have been interchangeable.

I do not feel that *The Monster of the Prophecy* by Clark Ashton Smith; *The Leadin Ring*, by S. Baring-Gould; *A Sense of Crawling*, by Robert Edmond Alter; *The Laughing Duke*, by Wallace West; *Transient and Immortal*, by Jim Haught; or *The Ultimate Creature*, by R. A. Lafferty, all of which appeared in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*, would have been suitable for *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*.

I do not feel that *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, by Murray Leinster; *The Man From Nowhere*, by Edward D. Hoch; *The Tottenham Werewolf*, by August Derleth, or any of the other Simon Ark stories, would have been suitable for *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*. Almost any of the others might have appeared in MOH, although in a number of instances, I would not have run them there except in a case of makeup emergency—where the copy I have set up for an issue of MOH doesn't fit; there's a hole, and something left over from SMS, which I feel could be used, fits in perfectly.

A few stories could have appeared in either of the weird files or *FAMOUS SCIENCE FICTION*, though not many. *Caverns of Horror*, by Laurence Manning, and

Death From Within, by Sterling S. Cramer, come to mind.

Obviously no one reader is going to agree with me on all selections. And I expect disagreement where necessity has resulted in a borderline case, such as *The Ultimate Creature*, by R. A. Lafferty, which ran in MOH rather than FSF as originally intended. Actually, it was off-trail for FSF, being a highly bizarre and metaphysical tale with a science fiction background, but a number of MOH readers objected on the grounds that this was "science fiction", and I somewhat sympathize. I cannot pledge that this sort of thing will never, positively never, occur again—but I can promise that it will not happen frequently.

Speaking of the Cramer tale, Gene D. D'Orsogna, writes: "*Death From Within* was a fast-moving, well conceived story with much sound logic to back up its fantastic premise. It makes one wonder if a stomach ache is as simple as it sounds. By the way, don't try to convince me that this story wasn't science-fiction."

"*The Dwarf's Shadow* was de Grandin as we all know and love him: a bit pompous, sentimental, and timeless. Although a bit static and more 'talky' than average, there was in evidence a sound plot and excellent execution. Even though I am not involved with the subject, the psychological reasoning rang true and made the story fascinating. More de Grandin!"

"*The Glass Floor* was a diverting, if unsatisfying, little bit of fluff. It seemed, however, that the basic concept of a dimensionally 'sick' room may have been (unknowningly) filched from Seabury Quinn's classic

The Cloth of Madness. As I have said, though, it was entertaining, but slightly unoriginal and 'dangling'.

"*The Dark Castle*, to my mind, was impossible to rate. There was just nothing new here. Man encounters vampire, man pursues vampire, inevitably wipes out same. So what? One cannot really blame the author for unoriginality. Since Bram Stoker gave birth to *Dracula*, he made the field of vampirism his own, and nearly slammed the door on the subject to other writers. Only two stories of any merit come to mind, these being Seabury Quinn's *Restless Souls* and John Metcalfe's diverting twist on the theme, *The Feasting Dead*. Undoubtedly there are others, but not, I'm afraid, Marion Brandon's uninspired piece."

It's always risky to assume that because story B appears later than story A—and story A is very well known; and there are similarities between the two; therefore the author of story B was inspired by story A. It could be, and sometimes is; but I would only be certain if the author of story B acknowledged a debt.

This was brought home quite forcefully by the case of *The Distortion Out of Space*, by Francis Flagg, which appeared in the August 1934 issue of *WEIRD TALES* (and which I re-ran in the June 1965, #9, issue of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*). The January 1934 issue of *WONDER STORIES* had run *The Man From Ariei*, by Donald A. Wollheim, and there was a point of resemblance between the two stories—not enough for Mr. Wollheim to object, but enough for him to feel that Mr. Flagg might have been inspired by the ear-

Tales of Wonder

THE HELL
PLANET

by

Leslie F. Stone

•

THE
INDIVIDUALISTS

*The fourth story in
the famous series—
complete in its picture
of a strange
civilization*

by

Lourence Manning

•

THE INVULNERABLE
SCOURGE

A Different Story

by

John Scott Campbell

don't miss issue #6

FAMOUS
SCIENCE FICTION

Tier-appearing story. A flattering thing, since Flagg had a respectable reputation, and Wollheim was among his admirers, while this had been DAW's first appearance as an author. It turned out, however, that Editor Farnsworth Wright had accepted the Flagg story prior to December 1933, when the Wollheim tale appeared.

So while it's fun to play influence detective—I enjoy doing it myself, and enjoy the indefatigable way that Sam Moskowitz plays the game—it is not well to take your deductions too seriously. Sometimes the tightest-seeming case will turn out to be wrong. I myself have been the subject of a very reasonable-sounding deduction which happened to be mistaken simply because it assumed knowledge on my part when I wrote the first version of a story which I did not actually have, although I had it when I revised and expanded the hard cover publication some years later. And one reason why I made use of the knowledge then was because William Atheling made the point; it was too good not to make conscious use of when the opportunity came. C. S. Lewis has noted, too, that he has been credited with underlying rationales and symbolism in his stories that are so clever he wished he'd thought of them himself.

I have to assume that everyone has not read *Dracula*, or has had a surfeit of the more or less traditional vampire story; and this principle goes with other types of weird tale, too. The returns show that while you and a couple of others put *The Dark Castle* way down on the list—it received one "X"—there were more readers who either rated it "O"—outstanding—or put it in first place.

Oddly enough, when I first read the story, back in 1931, it seemed pretty "old hat" to me (I'd just read *Dracula* a year or so before); but on re-reading, around 1963/64, it seemed much better. I find this an unusual thing in re-reading these old stories, for while for the most part I find my original impressions reasonably well confirmed, it's more likely that I'll think less of a story now than I did then, if there is any substantial change in feeling . . . No, the tale's no masterpiece, but it's somewhat better than I originally thought.

The above opinion (strictly my own) seems to be shared by Ron Smith, who writes: "I must say, I wish you would print more of the old Gothic type of story like *The Dark Castle*. This has been sadly lacking in several past issues. *Death From Within* was excellent and I urge you to print more weird science fiction. It proves a change of pace between fantasy and just weird pieces. I also would like to implore you for more fiction by Hugh B. Cave. *The Door of Doom* and *The Ghoul Gallery* were each best in their respective issues, as Cave knew how to create an atmosphere of horror and keep it up all the way through, leaving you with a chill and a strong remembrance afterward . . .

"My *Lady of the Tunnel* was a disappointment. After the excellent *The Room of Shadows* in MOH #15, I was expecting something much superior. *The Glass Floor* was interesting and rather shocking. King is a very promising young writer and I'm sorry you had to send back his longer tale. It would have been

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#3, Winter 1966/67: *The Inn of Terror*, Gaston Leroux; *The Other*, Robert A. W. Lowndes; *The Door of Doom*, Hugh B. Cave; *A Matter of Breeding*, Ralph Hayes; *Esmerelda*, Rama Wells; *The Trial for Murder*, Chas. Dickens & Chas. Collins; *The Blood-Flower*, Seabury Quinn.

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#4, Spring 1967: *The Tottenham Were* woff, by August Derleth; *The Secret of Lost Valley*, by Robert E. Howard; *Midnight For Justice*, by Victor Rousseau; *Si Urag Of The Tail*, by Oscar Cook; *The Temptation of Haringay*, by H. G. Wells; *The Tenants of Broussac*, by Seabury Quinn.

#5, Summer 1967: *The Gods of East and West*, Seabury Quinn; *The Counsel and The House* (verse), Robert A. W. Lowndes; *Behind the Curtain*, Leslie Jones; *A Game of Chess*, Robert Barr; *The Man From Nowhere*, Edward D. Hoeh; *The Darkness on Fifth Avenue*, Murray Lemmon.

#6, Fall 1967: *My Lady of the Tunnel*, Arthur J. Burks; *The Glass Floor*, Stephen King; *Death From Within*, Sterling S. Crane; *A Vision* (verse), Robert E. Howard; *Aim for Perfection*, Beverly Haas; *The Dark Castle*, Marion Brandon; *Dona Diablo*, Anna Hunger; *The Druid's Shadow*, Seabury Quinn.

#7, Winter 1967/68: *The Bride of the Peacock*, E. Hoffman Price; *Nice Old House*, Donna Tolson; *Those Who Seek*, August Derleth; *John Barrow's Watch*, Ambrose Bierce; *The Pet of Mrs. Lidd*, Robert Barbour Johnson; *The Man Who Chained the Lightning*, Paul Ernst.

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extremely interesting to see how he stood up in a longer story. Miss Hunger did a very good job on *Dona Diablo*. I felt the story was superb. de Grandin is beginning to get a bit droll. *The Tenants of Broussac* and *The Druid's Shadow* were not really up to the standards of the others you've run."

Author King is cordially invited to re-submit the story I had to return, due to length, if it is not over 6000 words! . . . I was curious as to how the readers would react to the omission of a de Grandin tale in our Winter (#7) issue. Herbert E. Beach writes: "I missed the Seabury Quinn's entry in this issue, but suspect that you are doing this to test the reaction of the readership—and I notice that you have one scheduled for the following issue. You may put me down as in favor of continuing series type stories in SMS, but I guess I indicated this in the stories that I selected for first place this time." (Mr. Beach put *Bride of the Peacock* and *The Man Who Chained the Lightning* in a tie for first place).

Leaving the de Grandin story out has made it possible for us to have a blank test (as opposed to asking you to vote on whether we should have a de Grandin story in each issue); but that was not the reason why it was pulled back to the next issue: The reason was that the two other stories ran to such length that we could not fit de Grandin in and still wind up with a minimum of five stories on the contents page! At this moment, I have very incomplete returns, but thus far there is no doubt that de Grandin was missed. RAWL

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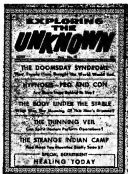
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